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ARGOSY

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November

THE colour of stone when leaves are yellow,
Comes the squirrel, a capital C,
With tail atilt like a violoncello,
Comes the squirrel, musically.

Quick, quick, quick, the notes fly
Up, and off the cello floats
Over the lawn where children play,
Over matchstick-masted boats.

Underway in the lagoon,
Down the steps, the rock walls,
Over a Triton, bearing shells,
Music flows, water falls.

Time, old hunchback, worn and yellow,
Whets his scythe on weathered stone,
While azure mists invade the hollow,
And turkey-red the leaves come down.

WILLIAM JAY SMITH

DANCE OF ARATI

A lifetime of joy seemed to well out with the music and the incense

by EDITH MACWHIRTER

HE was quiet-faced and elderly and meagre-haired, and he stood modestly among the crowd at the village shrine, with his folded hands resting on his stick, as he watched the youth who danced Arati before the Goddess Durga.

The incense swirled bluely from the vessel in the dancer's hand, so that now a gauze-fine curtain seemed to shroud his movements as if he were spiralling entranced in some half-imagined heaven, and then as the fragrance cleared again, the dance would come whirling back into the lamplit reality of the Bengal night.

When the incense burnt low, the dancer paused to replenish the resin; and at the pause, the crowd stirred and its fringes frayed out, drawn away from the pandal by the bright attractions of the shops and the booths that ringed the Puja ground. But the old man leaning on the stick did not stir, and his eyes did not move from the shrine where the clouding blue fragrance came fanning out once more as the cymbals crashed and the drum ran softly, and the proud-muscled youth leapt again into the dance.

Only his hands, resting on the stick, showed that the old man shared the exultation of the dancer—his hands, tensing and relaxing with the rhythm, as nearly sixty years ago they had clapped in excitement when his father had swung him up to his shoulder to see his first Arati dance.

His first Arati dance—the thought of it sent a musical warmth coursing through him: to remember it was to be young again, to be not Lalu-the-shoemaker, but Lalu-the-son-of-the-shoemaker, watching Arati from a firm shoulder, or squirming and crawling through a thicket of brown legs to watch it, round-eyed and open-mouthed, from the ground before the shrine.

Even then, for him, the dancing had been the highlight of the celebrations, seeming to express more vividly than anything else the joy that he felt in the festival. Night after night he would come down to the pandal with his parents, and when Puja was finished and Arati had begun, and all the other children were yawning and fidgeting and turning hopeful eyes towards the stalls,

bright with toys and balloons and coloured sweetmeats, he would only edge nearer to the shrine to watch the dancer.

And then, next morning, on the path beside the mustard plot at his father's door, he would imitate all that he had seen, commanding his small legs to reproduce the grave, exultant steps. Or if he were sent out to fetch the cattle he would come dancing back down the village street with them, so that at times he would be half a kos ahead of them, and at other times half a kos behind.

It was the same when he went with the other children to kick a ball about on the plain. He would run as fleetly as the rest until some memory diverted him, and then he would give a little leap and cup his hands, and the boys and the ball would go coursing on, leaving him to dance to himself.

The light-footed one, they called him in the village. They said it was because his father was a cobbler and spent all day thinking of feet and working with shoes that his son had been born with so much life in his toes. But Lalu never minded their teasing: he would only smile and go dancing on through the growing-up years, longing for the time to come round when he would be old enough to offer himself for Arati dancing. It was his only ambition in life; to be allowed to dance before the Goddess Durga at Puja time—there was nothing else he wanted, nothing at all.

When he was fourteen they began to say in the village, "Next Durga Puja, Lalu-the-son-of-the-shoemaker will dance. Next Puja it will be Lalu's turn."

And as the rainy season poured itself away, everyone advised him to practise his steps with all seriousness; and the village tailor and his brother, who both danced Arati every year, offered to take him in hand and to teach him all that they knew. So every evening he would go to their house to master the finer shades of body movement and eloquent gesture. There he would dance in the heat-solid night until his muscles gleamed with sweat and his eyelids were heavy with fatigue. And in the mornings, when he sat with his father mending and making sandals, all his thoughts would still be in his feet, and he would dream away at his cobbling until a chiding word recalled him to the importance of the task in his hands.

So at last the rains lightened that year, and the stars returned to the evening skies; the white grasses flowered along the river-bank, and the wagtail came back again to strut below the twinkling leaves of the peepul tree. When the old moon began to darken, the village waited eagerly to begin counting the days of the new bright moon; and Lalu's excitement had mounted with

the season, coiling up in him like a steel-bright spring, spiralling tautly, until the moment when it could be released—the moment when he would first leap into the dance before the Goddess Durga.

Often in those sweet September days he would go out to the bael tree on the fringes of the village, and watch the slow building of the pandal on the cattle-worn plain. Now the posts were up and the thatched roof was in place, and the image-makers had come with their straw and their sacks of blue clay. Now the framework was built, and the straw was tied and twisted into shape, and the clay was being mixed, and the figure of the Goddess was beginning to emerge.

One by one the ten arms were added and the fingers given to each hand. Ganesh received his trunk, Kartick his bow, and the peacock his splendid tail; and then the moulding of the image was complete. And there it stood, in the hot September sunshine, waiting until the clay was dry enough to be whitened in readiness for the jewel colours of the enamels.

Lalu visiting it one evening, and seeing it gleaming white and perfect in the dusk, had been so filled with exultation at the thought that soon the Goddess Durga would come to her image, and he, Lalu, would dance there before her, that he had been compelled to sit on his feet to prevent their breaking out into dancing there-and-then. But as he returned from the pandal his excitement overcame him, and he went dancing home down the village street, in and out of the shadow and the lamplight, his happiness glowing as brightly in his eyes as it winged his feet; so that everyone who saw him smiled at his eagerness and called out good-natured encouragement, as he went dancing away into the night.

The fever struck him next day.

It was the sixth day of the bright moon before he was able to move again; and when on that morning he dragged himself out into the sunlight at his father's door, one foot trailed, limp and disobedient, behind the other.

In vain did he strive to contract it and flex it, in vain did his father twist it and examine it, and his mother rub it with sweet curing oils—his left foot remained lifeless and unbiddable with all the dance gone out of it. And Durga Puja came and went, but Lalu-the-son-of-the-shoemaker, Lalu-the-light-footed, had no share in the Arati dancing at the shrine.

His disappointment was painful to everyone. "Never mind," the village told him, "it will pass. Soon your foot will be well again; and there is always next year—you will dance even better next year."

But another year went by without the dancing life returning to Lalu's foot, and Puja time came round again; but again he could only watch others exulting through the steps which he longed to dance himself.

So the seasons came and went, and each Durga time the village said: "Never mind, there is always next year. You will dance again one day—then you will dance even better for the rest which the Gods have given you."

But although Lalu nodded in acquiescence, in his heart he found it difficult to believe that the dead foot he dragged about with him could ever regain its dancing life; even at Durga Puja time, when anything miraculous might happen. But he always smiled philosophically: "Next year," he would answer, "in truth, I shall dance again next year."

The years passed, and he turned from Lalu-the-son-of-the-shoemaker into Lalu-the-shoemaker. Marriage gladdened him, his growing children contented him, his trade had prospered. In everything he counted himself a happy man, a richly happy man, in everything but in his inability to dance. Even now, when he had reached the quiet years and should be content to set all dancing thoughts aside, and live only in his sons' and in his grandsons' lives, he still could not rid himself of his longing to dance Arati before the Goddess Durga.

He could never come hobbling down here to the pandal, never see the incense swirling, nor hear the first clash of the cymbals without realizing anew each time that he would give everything in his life if only once he might move smoothly towards the shrine, might lay aside his stick, and stand firm and straight, waiting with poised hands for the guidance of the music, so that his dance might flower from him in fitting tribute to the Goddess, as once it should have flowered.

Then the incense came drifting out again, filling his nostrils, obscuring the smiling Goddess, shrouding the movements of the dancer, and as it cleared, his old eyes peered again at the dancing youth. It was Lalu, his grandson, dancing there; and he knew that it should be recompense enough that he could watch his son's son dancing Arati—and yet if only he, too, could have his hour!

The incense was smarting in his eyes: he rubbed his knuckles across them, and as he drew his hand away he felt a compulsion to lift his head and look up at the Goddess. And he stood transfixed as he looked at her; for he saw that it was not his eyes that had sought the Goddess, but hers that had sought him, that seemed to command him as her arms to beckon.

The sweat broke out on his body, and his hands clenched on his stick while the dance pulsed through the highway of his veins, and all the time he could see only the Goddess, arms beckoning, eyes commanding.

He edged clumsily forward through the crowd—step and lurch, step and lurch, he went. He did not hear the thud of his fallen stick as he salaamed at the shrine; but as he rose again to his feet his trembling hands came out in the gracious opening gesture of the dance, which, so often and so long, he had practised and perfected.

But only his hands moved as he stood wavering there in the lamplight, and his grandson, crouching beside him, stirred a stronger incense from fresh resin, so that the smoky blue veil came swirling up, wreathing closely about the old man, caressing his bare arms, breathing at his ears.

"Like this, and like this," it seemed to be saying as it went twisting and drifting. "You haven't forgotten, all these long years. Like this and like this!"

He smiled as he yielded. Dimly he realized that his own hand now held the incense vessel, and that he must offer its fragrance with his dance to the Goddess. His fingers tightened about its stem as the cymbals stirred together and the music went racing through him, tingling and pulling at his muscles.

His body tautened with the rhythm, and with this first tension, he thought fiercely of his leaden foot. It *must* dance. It *should* dance. Was not this his shining hour? Had not Durga herself commanded him, Lalu-the-shoemaker, Lalu-the-leaden-foot, to dance in her praise?

He drew a great breath. He poised, he crouched—he leapt! And he knew with growing joy that his dead foot lived again, that the buoyant dance had come back to it, and that each movement he made was as precise and fluent and balanced as the most practised Arati dancing.

A murmur of amazement ran through the crowd as they recognized the dancer; and from the fringes of the crowd it spread out to the merrymakers ranging the Puja ground. One by one they were drawn back to the pandal, until presently the balloons and the ribbons and the toys were flaunting, untended, on the stalls, and the tea was cooling in the thick glasses beside the bright pink biscuits, and the silver coins were lying unchallenged on the painted gambling cloths.

The village pressed close and hot and silent about the lamplit shrine, where the incense swirled and Lalu-the-shoemaker danced out his adoration. Never before had such dancing been witnessed there; and the village marvelled at the old man's inspiration.

Was this truly Lalu-the-shoemaker, who, only a few minutes before, had been standing there amongst them, insignificant and elderly, with his hands folded acquiescently about his cripple's stick?

Now as he danced, happiness shone in his face and streamed from every movement of ankle and wrist, so that a lifetime of joy seemed to come welling out to them all with the music and the incense. And absorbing it, gradually they accepted it; and their amazement faded.

Had they not always prophesied this, they asked each other rationally; had they not always insisted that one day Lalu-the-shoemaker, Lalu-the-leaden-foot would dance again—dance even better for the long rest that the Gods had given him? And was this not the season when the miraculous might thus be expected to happen? Were these not the bright days of Durga Puja?

Before the smiling Goddess the ecstatic dance flowered on, achieving its full radiance; and the incense reached its clouding zenith and its fragrance dwindled as with lotus-cupped hands the dancer quietened to his final pose—quietened, and stumbled, and lay still in the sacred dust below the shrine.

As he lay there, unmoving, the drummer rose up beside him and dealt a great exultant blow to the drum, so that its challenge went rushing out from the pandal across the cattle-worn plain to the rim of the star-enchanted night; and its echo went running after in little leaps of happy sound, like young feet—eager, dancing young feet.

★ ★ ★

FIT AND PROPER

Fits, just imported from Italy; being a speedy and efficacious method of procuring the most captivating and natural faintings, and will be found particularly useful in the riotous season when all ladies would be ambitious to appear in public with a proper delicacy of nerves, which some, from a too good constitution have the misfortune to want. These fits are sold sealed up in small boxes, five in each, in colour and appearance like a barley drop, so innocent that a child of two years old may take them with safety; each drop is a sure fit of ten minutes, at the expiration of which you are as well, if not better than before taking them; the operation is immediate. To be sold at all the perfumers, with printed directions, price 4 shillings the box or 1 shilling a single fit.

Lady's Magazine,–1764

THE CAT THAT SMILED

"What has that wireless man been saying?" I asked

by WOLF MANKOWITZ

THE man who used to collect the weekly payment on the radio was a lonely man.

That much I could tell by the hungry way in which he used to keep my wife talking at the door. And he would always call on a Thursday, just about the time we were sitting down to tea. I think that he never could have had tea himself, because on the one occasion that I went to the door instead of my wife, he looked distinctly thin, and certainly betrayed none of the uneasy hurry that a man waiting for his tea usually betrays.

He always called just early enough to make me wait for my tea, and I chafed sometimes for as much as half an hour, waiting for him to sign the book and go. However, I never bothered to ask what they talked about, though I did notice, after only the fifteenth month of collection, that my wife had become nervous. And she seemed particularly nervous when our cat, Phillip, was in the room.

Our cat Phillip was not, I suppose, in the legal sense, ours. We had found her as a kitten and had called her by my wife's favourite name, and when some few months later we found we had made a mistake, we thought that there was no need now to change a name to which she answered so well.

There was nothing unusual about Phillip. She was a strong, healthy, moderately clean cat, catching an occasional mouse, having kittens discreetly in the shed at the bottom of the garden, and eating practically anything that we found it convenient to give her. She even seemed to be quite fond of us in the impersonal way of cats, and we all lived together happily without incident until, as I say, about the fifteenth month of the wireless man's visits.

I was quite unable to relate his calls to my wife's increasing aversion to Phillip, until one day she came in from the front door—I was sitting at the table waiting for my tea—and said: "It's no good, Fred. Phillip must go."

I was, as you can imagine, taken aback. To have my wife, who had always behaved with the greatest kindness towards

Phillip, suddenly demand her expulsion from the house filled me with anxiety. If the cat could be rejected with such ease, what might not follow?

I felt the whole of our balanced life losing its poise, and I asked straight out: " What has that wireless man been saying? "

My wife just bit her lips without replying, but I was determined to have a showdown. I stood up and pushed the chair away.

" Matilda," I said, " I don't mind admitting, now it has come to this, that I have noticed a great change in you lately." I watched the effect of my words upon my wife. She went quite pale and bit her lower lip savagely. I went on: " Ever since that man has called here, I have been kept waiting for my tea, and our evening routine has now been ruined every Thursday for the past fifteen months. I am a quiet man, Matilda, but—"

My wife burst into tears. She sat down in the chair in which I had, for more than half an hour, been waiting for my tea, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Finally, through her tears; she told me the whole truth of the matter.

The wireless man was, as I had suspected, lonely. He had told her in the first few weeks of his visits the story of his early life; and when he had put her in touch with the details of his background and early years, he had gone on to explain to her the more intimate habits of his present life.

He was, for example, a complete teetotaller—which meant that he would not chance even cider that was labelled non-alcoholic. He sang every Sunday morning at a Baptist mission at the bottom of the cul-de-sac where he lodged in a house for thirty-five shillings a week. He wanted, however, to get a small flat somewhere, even if it meant changing his work—although, he said, his present job, bringing him into touch as it did with all sorts of people, was very pleasing to him. However, if he could only get a small place of his own, he would be able to fulfil his deepest desire.

He had always wanted to keep animals. At first, as a boy, he had not cared what sort and, completely against the wishes of his step-parent, kept mice in a box under a floorboard, bringing them out only at night for food and exercise. They were eventually discovered in a heat-wave, and he was punished harshly for his disobedience. Then he got a newt from a boy at school. He had given the other child an apple for the little lizard, but he did not tell my wife where he had got the apple from, although I feel certain his step-parent had not given it to him.

After a number of escapades, in all of which it was simply a question of his wanting some sort of animal, he had developed a particular obsession. His interest in cats had grown from the

day on which he had passed a shop whose window held a large pen with a number of kittens in it. Pressing his nose to the window, he noticed that only one of the kittens took any notice of him. He noticed that it had quite a friendly face, and then suddenly, for no particular reason, it smiled at him.

Since that time he had been devoted to cats. Though he was still fond of other animals, cats were really his true love, and his one desire was to get hold of a place of his own and to live quietly with a few cats to keep him company.

Now all this was interesting, but not out of the ordinary, and I interrupted my wife to say that I could not for the life of me see how it concerned our own Phillip. Matilda answered that the story had taken her fifteen months to learn, and I should certainly not expect to be able to hear it all in a few minutes. I mixed her a sedative in a glass of warm milk, and she continued her account of the wireless man's story.

He had not as yet been able to get a little flat on his own, but he had obtained permission from his landlady to keep a pet in his own room. The woman was not particularly pleased with the idea, but he eventually convinced her that no harm could come of it. He then went out—the very same Saturday that she agreed to allow it—and bought himself a black kitten.

It was not the same sort of kitten as that which he had seen in his childhood smiling so benignly from behind plate glass, but it was, in spite of its immaturity, an intelligent-looking animal that could be expected to possess some sort of distinct and unusual talent. He kept this kitten for some months with him, sitting in front of it every evening, expecting great things from it.

The kitten grew and developed as one would have expected it to. It gave the wireless man company, and it seemed—just as Phillip had with us—to be quite fond of him. He found that he was sleeping well, and he did not stay at his calls nearly so long as he had previously.

One night, however, he could not sleep. It was quite as hot as that night on which his white mice had been discovered in their box beneath the floorboards. There was no sleeping for more than a few minutes at a time.

His cat was sitting in a corner, awake, and he was pleased to have her company. Her eyes shone at him, and for some time he looked at her in the dark. Then he lit a candle, and suddenly noticed in the flickering light that the cat was smiling quite distinctly. Feeling most gratified, he smiled back. The cat then jumped onto the table, tittering at something or other.

The wireless man jumped to his feet and clapped his hands together, and then, as the cat, laughing in a high-pitched voice,

stood on her hind legs and offered him her paw, he was overcome with the sense of his good fortune.

Full of reverent feeling at this justification of his faith, he reached forward to touch the cat's paw, tears glistening in his eyes; and then, still laughing, the cat leapt onto the bed, and with a great gurgle of enjoyment jumped out of the window.

This was as much as my wife had learnt of the wireless man's story when she began to notice that Phillip had a tendency to smile quietly every so often. This notion that our cat was grinning to itself about some private joke or other grew, until now my wife could not see Phillip without feeling that in some way or other she had some secret joke against us.

On this particular occasion of the wireless man's visit, she felt Phillip's attitude more strongly than ever, for the man had told her that although he had never found his cat again, he still heard her at night, laughing quite heartily somewhere out in the street. His disappointment at her going off like that was quite enough to prevent him ever getting another cat. Her place could never be filled, anyway.

After this last visit of the wireless man, my wife had come in, and the scene I have described occurred. It took me quite some time to convince her that Phillip had no unworthy feeling towards us: that when she smiled, it was with a sort of general satisfaction, and that her quiet laughing had always been considerably soothing to me personally.

Fortunately, my wife is a reasonable woman. I was able to convince her that Phillip was pleasantly disposed towards us, and there and then we decided to draw enough money out of the Post Office account (which we hold together) to pay off the remainder.

This we did, and now my wife and Phillip and I are in the happy position of being able to sit down on a Thursday evening to our high tea and laugh heartily together without interruption from the wireless man calling just as we are ready to eat.

ARGOSY FOR CHRISTMAS

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Please write names and addresses in BLOCK CAPITALS

CARILLON

Climbing the steep, candle-lit stairs, she felt like a girl in an old romance

by FRANCES TOWERS

THE Willoughbys lived on a secluded quay, in one of those tall colour-washed houses which throw their reflections into the canal and bewitch the stagnant water with the patterns of their pointed roofs and their tints of old rose and cinnamon, of olive-green and puce and saffron. Four plain Miss Willoughbys and their mother.

Their cousin Elspeth, arriving on a visit one fine autumn evening, thought that they were like four German princesses in some rococo court of a past generation, with their fuzzed hair and heavy faces. She had never before been abroad and the old city with its bells and its smells seemed an enchanted place.

Her bedroom had a vaulted roof like a chapel, and when she had unpacked her trunk and put away her clothes in the *armoire*, that vast piece of furniture still yawned empty, exuding a faint bitter scent which baffled description. Months afterwards, shaking out a garment she had not worn since the visit, she would be taken unawares by that scent and a sudden yearning for the plangent, melancholy sound of the chimes would assail her.

As she closed the door of the *armoire*, carved like a church door with saints in niches, the chimes broke out, almost it seemed above the roof, into the tune the pot of the Swineherd played to the Princess: *Ach, du lieber Augustin, Augustin, Augustin* . . . mocking and sweet as the warning of a fairy godmother.

She went down to supper in another tall vaulted room. A servant in felt slippers, with ear-rings in her pretty ears, and combs in the glossy braided hair brought in the *pain de veau* and chicory salad.

Hilda said, in a toneless voice, " I've got a piece of news. Derek Galbraith is coming back." And immediately Elspeth became aware of a sudden tension in the atmosphere. It was like the moment when rabbits, scenting danger, stiffen into immobility before bolting for cover. Mrs. Willoughby alone seemed unaffected. She went on stirring the salad as if the name had no particular significance. But why did they all begin to talk at once, rather bright-eyed and strained?

Presently Margaret said, " Mother I can't possibly wear my old black velvet again this winter."

Mrs. Willoughby regarded her for a moment in silence. Then she replied shortly, " Joséphine can dodge it up."

" I had my hair washed today in honour of Elspeth," remarked Maud, craning her neck to look into a mirror on the wall, " and Henri said "—she giggled—" Henri said to me, ' It is strange, Mademoiselle, when your hair is so thick, so beautiful, that your sisters' should be so scanty.' Wasn't it cheek? "

There was a painful silence.

" One can understand Henri's success," said Alice with a sniff. " He applies a bit of psychology with the curling tongs."

After supper Aunt Aggie went off to play bridge, and the girls got out their work.

" I wonder," said Margaret pensively, " whose heart will be broken this time . . . Not Elspeth's, I hope."

Through the closed wooden shutter the chimes broke in with a stave. *Ach, du lieber Augustin*, they sang ironically, to mark the quarter. " Those bells! " murmured Elspeth.

But the others did not seem to have noticed them. The girls looked up, and their large pale eyes rested on Elspeth.

" I should hope she wouldn't be so silly. But we'd better warn her," said Hilda.

" There is a man, Elspeth, we particularly dislike "—Alice detached a few bobbins and altered a pin on the strip of lace pattern she was working—" one of those charmers. You are rather his type, but he doesn't mean anything."

" There is *one* family he makes no impression on. Four impervious females. It must be a new-experience for D.G.," said Margaret.

" So good for him, my dear," added Maud with a mirthless laugh.

" But I have come over here for music and French, not to fall in love," said Elspeth.

" You wait! " they replied darkly, in chorus.

" It's quite a joke in this family," Alice took up the tale, " the way visitors have affairs that never come to anything. It must be something in the atmosphere that goes to their heads."

" And afterwards," said Margaret, gleefully, " they write long reminiscent letters, you know, mentioning everyone except the one person they are pining to hear of. But they never can resist adding a postscript—' By the way, do you ever see anything of So-and-so these days? ' Ostriches! Naturally we are amused."

" Well, it's kind of you to warn me. One thing I can promise you—never to write a postscript," said Elspeth.

"I suppose one could call him Byronic," one of them said, "because he has no heart, and a fatal attraction for women."

"You must tell me all about him—the disturbing person," Elspeth remarked encouragingly.

And then the flood-gates were opened. Charlotte Brontë herself could hardly have painted a more sardonic portrait, or black-browed gypsies uttered more cryptic warnings of a spade man over the water than the four Misses Willoughby as they poured out their hearts.

They talked until Hélène came in with five pale glasses of hot milk and five candlesticks on a tray, and then as they sipped the milk they told her of other affairs. The old city, it appeared, was a hotbed of intrigue, and everyone—except the Miss Willoughbys, who were cynics and proud of it—was in love with someone. The ramparts after dark—from time immemorial the place and the hour for clandestine meetings . . . what a tale those old walls could tell!

As she climbed the steep flight of stairs with her guttering candle, Elspeth felt like a girl in some old romance. The smell of abroad, a queer smoky smell of coffee and herbs and moribund water, was in the very house. And the sounds of abroad—sabots clip-clopping on cobblestones, a drunken man singing *Chérie-e, bonne amie* at the top of his voice, and above all the carillon chiming the hours—came in through the shuttered windows.

Living abroad, one learns not to be squeamish. There was Joséphine, for instance, who made the girls dresses. Aunt Aggie had discovered her in an unsavoury alley—a perfect genius, and wonderfully cheap. The Willoughbys kept her dark. She turned out garments that would have been adorable on other people. It seemed odd that such a flair for chic lurked under her unprepossessing exterior. The Willoughbys never knew that by some mysterious corrosive acid of personality they destroyed—as soon as they put them on—that quality of distinctive charm in the dresses which Joséphine had delighted to create.

"*Comme ça, vous savez, Joséphine,*" a Willoughby would say, looking doubtfully at a pattern. "*Mais pas trop . . . trop . . .*"

Always it seemed impossible that the dressmaker's little sunken eyes, her scarred fingers could achieve the frock of one's dreams.

"*Oui, oui, je comprends parfaitement ce que Mademoiselle désire, quelque chose pour bouleverser les messieurs.*"

"If there are going to be parties I'd better get another dress. Mother said, 'Wait till you get there—it's so much cheaper,'" said Elspeth.

She bought some metres of pale green silk, the colour of lily-of-the-valley leaves that have been forced, and took them to

Joséphine. They looked at patterns together, and Joséphine's hair smelled very queer, like canal-water.

Joséphine said suddenly, "*Il y a un monsieur bien gentil. Mademoiselle a entendu parler, peut-être, de ce Monsieur Galbraith?*"

That name, again! Elspeth gave a little jump. There was a gleam in Joséphine's eyes, an uncanny light, like a candle suddenly shining through the dark windows of a haunted house. It was as if she were aware in some occult way of things that had not yet happened to one, as if she knew, in the murky depths of her, what fate had up its sleeve, but could do no more than drop a hint in her sepulchral voice.

The frock came back, done up in a brown-paper parcel, a week later.—Elspeth shook it out and it rippled into its folds as creaseless and immaculate as though a fairy had made it. With one of her touches of genius, Joséphine had sewn a spun-glass *fantaisie* on the shoulder, very cold and dewy.

Everyone, thought Elspeth, would see her in it . . . except Monsieur Raab, who taught her the violin, and had no relations, other than professional, with the English colony. What a pity! "Light, light as the dew on a flower," he had said yesterday, of a little phrase she had been bungling.

And like dew the *fantaisie* glistened on the green of her gown.

When he took the fiddle out of one's hands and played the little phrase himself, one knew that life had no secret too subtle, too delicate, for his comprehension; that if, greatly daring, one were to ask some day, "*Que pensez-vous de l'amour, Monsieur?*" he could, if he would, reply with a word that would be a living flower from the tree of wisdom. If he would. But very likely his answer would be a grunt.

The girls said hard things about him. They were put out because he had offered to give her extra lessons. They had learnt from him for years without a word of encouragement, and technically they were far in advance of her. He was a boor, they said—a bad-tempered wretch. Very likely he beat his wife.

What nonsense, thought Elspeth. His life was a closed book to her. She tried to imagine what it was like, with its background of wisdom and music. Perhaps, in the early morning when Madame was making the coffee in a dark kitchen shining with brass pots, he would tiptoe out into the garden in his slippers, a swarthy thickset figure buttoned up in a tight jacket, to look for a belated rose, or to part the violet leaves in search of small crumpled flowers—short-stalked and frost-bitten, because it was October. There would be currant bushes spangled with cobwebs, and misty blue cabbages, and perhaps a bunch of zinnias,

demurely and delicately tinted as the city itself. And afterwards they would have their coffee and rolls in a room with a black japanned stove and oilcloth on the table and a tawdry plaster Virgin on a bracket.

But once such a nice thing happened. Walking alone by the water one green afternoon, she came upon Monsieur Raab throwing crumbs out of a paper bag to the birds.

The plane trees had shed most of their leaves and were hung with green furry nuts. The trunks, with their silver blisters and satiny tatters of brown and grey, made a dappled-pattern along the water's edge, as though a herd of deer had come down to drink, but in the water the reflection looked like striped snakes with silver bellies. Monsieur Raab in his black felt hat, brown jacket, and scarf of grey silk was perfectly in accord with the landscape. He was so taken up with the waterfowl that he didn't see her. A swan sailed up to the edge, reared up its flat head, and jabbed at a morsel on his outstretched palm.

He shook out the last of his crumbs far and wide to the little coots and dark sad birds that couldn't compete with the ducks, and put the paper bag in his pocket, and then turning, he saw Elspeth and swept off his hat.

"*Tiens!*" he said smiling. "From the corner of my eye I saw something golden in the air—oh, but like barley when it is ripe—but I thought, it cannot be Mademoiselle Wade, for she is surely practising the Sonatina she finds so difficult."

"But I can't be practising all the time," said Elspeth, secretly elated at the allusion to her hair.

"Assuredly," he replied gravely, "and it would be a pity, perhaps, when the sun is shining and the lake is so beautiful. *Tiens*, there is the little Chinese duck I am so fond of. Pretty one, you have come too late. I have not a crumb left, not one."

The little duck looked back at him with her round orange eye.

"She is a widow," said Monsieur Raab. "Last winter when the lake was frozen, they had only a small piece of water, and the drake swam under the ice. I found him too late; with a hatchet I broke up the ice, but he was already stiff."

He sighed, hunting in his pockets for a chance morsel. "I put him there in the reeds and when I came back the little duck was trying to wake him. No, I have not so much as a crumb. But I shall go to my home and get some more bread."

"Why should life be so sad?" said Elspeth as she walked beside him over the mottled, fan-shaped leaves. The smell of autumn was bitter-sweet, and through the warmth of the sun she was aware of a cool little breath from the lake—like iced golden wine in her mouth.

"But the little duck has already forgotten. I think she took another husband last spring. And we, we forget too," said Monsieur Raab.

He stopped at a rust-coloured house, in the shadow of the Cathedral, with folded-back blue shutters.

"When we are young, we think that grief is for ever. But it is not so," he said, taking a bag out of his pocket and wagging it at her solemnly. "A broken heart is mended before two Aprils come and go. When the time comes, remember what I have said."

How wise he was, with his kind strong face, his grizzled hair cut *en brosse*, and his small piercing eyes that seemed to look through one's breast-bone into one's heart. But probably he had never heard of Derek Galbraith, the breaker of hearts, who seemed to have cast his shadow over the future. She had seen his photograph in one or two salons, dominating the room so that she found her eyes straying to it. On one of them, Mrs. Wickham's (she had peroxide hair and, in her little ears, diamonds that flashed with green and rosy flames) was written in a small strong hand: "Yours while this heart beats, D.G."

More than the diamonds, that small intimate inscription bestowed a lustre on Mrs. Wickham . . .

Elspeth found herself almost dreading to meet him. She had always pitied the women who had been in love with Byron. Shy girls at assemblies—there must have been many such—agonizing on the outskirts whilst his bright glance swept on unrecognizingly, and crying into their pillows at night for envy of Caro Lamb.

But one must not be afraid of life . . .

The girls were looking forward to Christmas. It was the time when the bachelors came over to visit their families and dances blossomed at the back of the Opera House.

"D.G. is the divinest dancer but, of course, one doesn't sit out with him in dark corners," said Margaret, sewing red silk roses in her velvet gown.

"To be strictly accurate," said Hilda, the honest one, "one hasn't the chance. The Willoughbys aren't his style," she added, bitterly.

"Thank Heaven for that!" Margaret curled her lip. "One would be sorry indeed to be Derek Galbraith's style."

One day when Elspeth and she were alone Hilda said resentfully, "You know it would be very good for one's self-respect to flirt with him a little. My dear, if he would only give one the chance to turn him down!"

"But would one?" asked Elspeth, wide-eyed.

"I believe Margaret would," said Hilda, solemnly. "She is very strong-minded."

"One of you girls," said Aunt Aggie, "must come with me to Madame Vandenberg's party. I have accepted for one of my daughters."

"Can't Elspeth? She hasn't met any of the *noblesse* yet."

"Last time I felt like a gorged lioness," said Maud, "and drank so much wine because I couldn't stop them filling up the glasses—and there seemed to be dozens—that afterwards I fell down in the garden, trying to pick a violet."

Madame Vandenberg lived beyond the ramparts in the flat country, with its long straight roads bordered with poplars.

Elspeth had often passed the white box of a château in her walks. It had green shutters and a straggly, neglected garden, mostly very worn grass and apple trees, but, strangely enough, near the paling there was one star-shaped bed of scarlet begonias edged with box.

Madame Vandenberg was *noblesse*, one of the few who had any relations with the English colony.

Aunt Aggie and Elspeth arrived at the last moment, as everyone was trooping into the *salle à manger*. Elspeth found herself near Madame Vandenberg's end of the table and too close to the stove. Glancing up, she saw a face at the far end that she recognized at once. Even if she had never seen a photograph, she would have known that it could belong to no other than the Don Juan Tenorio of her cousins' world. So, he had come at last. Next to him was Madame's Dutch daughter-in-law, trim and elegant. Aunt Aggie seemed miles away, hidden by an epergne. There were several pasty-faced men with twisted moustaches and women in black and white, tightly corseted, their hats tilted fashionably on their undulated hair.

Madame's eyes, black and bitter like too strong coffee, watched the plates of her guests. She had elephant's ears, the thick lobes weighed down by ornate ear-rings, and small fat hands. A heavy wool vest showed above the V of her bodice. So many wineglasses, so many courses . . . and pig-faced men gobbling on either hand.

But at the other end, the sunlight caught the pale gold head of the Dutch girl. In the hot room smelling of varnish, of roast meat and nutmeg and wine, she looked as lost as a water-lily. She made all the other women seem vulgar. But that other face, with its regularity of feature, its extremely satisfying pattern, seen in proximity to hers, revealed that her beauty after all was

merely one of colouring, that her mouth was too small and tight, her eyes set too close together . . .

No man, thought Elspeth, has any right to look so much of a conquering hero.

When the toothpicks were in full play, Madame rose and herded the ladies into a salon. The wallpaper was frightful, orange and silver chrysanthemums on a black ground. There was much heavy dark furniture, and some monstrous pictures of game and fruit.

Young Madame Vandenberg pushed open a window and a wind from the west blew in on their flushed faces.

"*Mon dieu!*" screamed her mother-in-law. "Do you wish to kill us, Marie Thérèse?"

"Who will walk in the garden with me?" said Marie Thérèse. She went down the iron steps in her high-heeled shoes, her rose-coloured legs delicate as a flamingo's, as she held up her skirt.

"Elspeth," said Aunt Aggie, coming unexpectedly to the rescue, "would like to see the garden, I'm sure."

There was a smell of rain in the west wind, a smell of leaf-mould and late violets. Great red apples lay on the grass.

Marie Thérèse made polite conversation, but she was not much interested. *Jeunes filles* were not her cup of tea. She was as bad as Aunt Aggie. She hadn't seen the Memlings; and the tourists who set up their easels on the quays and made sketches as full of bloom as a dish of damsons amused her vastly.

"*Je ne vois pas comme ça—dieu merci! Et enfin ce n'est pas la vérité,*" said Marie Thérèse, with a shrug.

They passed a long window behind which, like replete tigers, *les messieurs* were relaxing after the banquet. Immediately the window was opened and Derek Galbraith sprang eagerly into the garden, followed by the fat little Baron de Machaux, who, with great presence of mind and an utter absence of tact, attached himself firmly to Marie Thérèse. She raised her thin gold eyebrows and smiled mockingly at Derek over his head.

"Permit me to present Monsieur Galbraith—Mademoiselle . . . Mademoiselle . . . ?"

"Wade," said Elspeth, stonily, only too sure that Don Juan would consider her society a poor substitute for that of the chic and most elegant Marie Thérèse, who was now being led away by the little Baron.

She raised her head a little defiantly and found herself looking into a pair of amused dark eyes.

"With whom are you staying over here?" inquired Mr. Galbraith, "and how do you like it?"

"I like it very much. It makes me feel as if I had got into

some old book . . . as if any day something queer might happen," said Elspeth.

" Something queer undoubtedly will, bound to, with your fabulous hair. You just wait," he smiled.

Fabulous . . . she made a mental note to think out all the implications of the word later on. They strolled over the grass which seemed supernaturally green, and the sticky smooth apples had a varnished look as if someone had picked them with a silk handkerchief. There was a cherry tree with its leaves turning red and the sheen on its bark like brown moiré silk . . .

" Isn't autumn delicious? " said Elspeth, raising her wine-flushed face for the touch of the wind. " Such lovely colours, as if Arabian queens were changing their shawls."

" Arabian queens? Now, is that an original metaphor, or have you read it somewhere? " he teased her, with a twinkle in his eyes.

" I suppose it's original—it came into my head," said Elspeth, feeling very young and shy.

" I thought," added Derek Galbraith, with a searching glance into her face, " that you had rather that look . . . how shall I describe it? It isn't for nothing that you have green eyes and honey-coloured hair . . . like a fairy's child."

" Elspeth, Els-peth," presently Aunt Aggie's voice reached them like a foghorn out of a mist, interrupting a very interesting conversation.

It was long and personal, but Elspeth remembered every word so distinctly . . . what he said and what she said, and the looks and gestures and tones of voice that accompanied the things they said, that afterwards she could have transcribed the entire interview in her private notebook. But there was no need; everything was printed indelibly on her mind and was lived through over and over again—until the next meeting added a fresh scene to the delicious interminable drama.

Sometimes they met by chance three times in a single day. But if a day passed without a meeting, if he deserted all his usual haunts and no one so much as mentioned his name, it was as if life had gone out of the city. The very bells had a jangled sound.

" What ails you, Mademoiselle? Your heart is not in music any more," said Monsieur Raab, one day. " You are wasting your time and mine. I think I do not come again."

" But, Monsieur, I beg of you not to think that music is unimportant to me. It seems indeed to mean more now than it ever did."

" Music has its own meaning," said Monsieur Raab, frowning.

He held out his hand—" Good-bye, Mademoiselle—and when you find you can give your mind once more to music—for its own sake, I mean, and for its own meaning—perhaps you will let me know."

Cross as two sticks! The cousins would be amused. Where was she drifting? Elspeth scarcely knew. A fairy's child. He had not seen her yet in her green gown. Nothing much happened at their chance meetings; but the touch of his hand, the tones of his voice, and the look in his eyes darkly shining went to her head like wine. The girls were oddly silent. If she came in rather bright-eyed from a walk, they looked at her searchingly and exchanged significant glances. One day Margaret remarked suddenly, " You can't say we haven't warned you, Elspeth."

Poor dears, they were green with jealousy, but so far they had very little to go upon. One hated to hurt them but, after all, they had quite made up their minds that one was going to hurt oneself, thought Elspeth.

She wore her green dress for the first time at the Ball the bachelors gave on Boxing Day at the Opera House . . . There was a little gasp of admiration from the other girls in the dressing-room when she took off the cloak.

" Elspeth . . . you really are the loveliest thing! " drawled a pretty American whose programme, as she had been at pains to inform everyone, had been booked up weeks before.

" My dear," said Mrs. Wickham, sotto voce, looking over Elspeth's shoulder at her raddled old face in the same mirror, " I always think it is so good-natured of the Miss Willoughbys, poor things, to have you about."

A tall figure draped in a crimson cape appeared in the doorway. Elspeth knew that sleek, pale gold head.

It was Marie Thérèse, who had not hitherto graced any English party with her presence—magnificent, statuesque Marie Thérèse, severely dressed in black. Her arms and bust had a texture as of white rose petals; she needed no ornament and wore none.

While Elspeth waited for her cousins to finish fussing over their coiffures, Marie Thérèse sailed out without noticing anyone.

" That, according to rumour, is our dear Derek's latest," said Mrs. Wickham in Elspeth's ear. " You know, he doesn't care much for young girls, the naughty fellow."

Elspeth's heart gave a sudden loud knock against her ribs. A faint scent of heliotrope, voluptuous and yet delicate, came from Marie Thérèse's cape.

" Come, Elspeth," said Margaret, leading the way.

It was draughty in the long corridor and their feet raised little clouds of dust from the red carpet. Tarnished gilt festoons and velvet and spotted mirrors created a Victorian music-hall atmosphere. Suddenly the loud blare of the band greeted their ears and they found themselves in the ballroom. A pink-faced youth gave Elspeth a programme. The Misses Willoughby ranged themselves on chairs against the wall, waiting to be claimed by those elderly Counts and Barons who had received hospitality during the year from Aunt Aggie and repaid it by dancing, very badly, with her daughters at the Christmas festivities.

Feeling young and lost Elspeth stood dangling her programme, wondering if its virgin waste would ever be peopled with initials . . .

Old Colonel Baker, with his bloodshot eyes and sagging cheeks, loomed up, like a sorrowful bloodhound, and asked her for a dance. Only a few couples had as yet taken the floor: where was Derek, one of the hosts of the evening?

She went round a few times with her partner, whose rather pathetic attempts at gallantry fell on deaf ears. Suddenly, she caught sight of Derek standing in a doorway watching Marie Thérèse, who with her train slung over one arm was dancing with the little Baron de Machaux.

"If he doesn't look at me I shall die," thought Elspeth, realizing at last, with icy clarity, whither she had drifted.

The band crashed with an ever-hastening tempo into the finale, and Colonel Baker brought her up short at Derek's very elbow.

Her heart beat wildly. She answered Colonel Baker's fatuous remarks at random, not hearing what he said . . . oblivious of four pairs of eyes watching her across the room.

But without so much as a glance in her direction, Derek Galbraith moved away. With his air of conquering hero, he went straight up to Marie Thérèse, bent over the long slender hand she extended so nonchalantly, and raised it to his lips. A quaint foreign custom which would mean nothing to Marie Thérèse. How strange!

In the next few minutes, Elspeth's programme became sprinkled with initials . . . foolish symbols. She looked with unseeing eyes at her prospective partners and heard her own voice and her laughter as if it were not she herself but some stranger laughing and talking. The band began to play a two-step, and Derek put an arm about Marie Thérèse. For a minute or two, they were the only couple on the floor, superb dancers, and so perfectly matched that everyone seemed momentarily under the illusion of watching a performance on the stage.

"That fellow!" said Elspeth's partner disgustedly, "Whatever he does, he's a star turn. Ever seen him skate, or play polo?"

Halfway through the evening, when she had given up hope and was longing for nothing so much as to creep into bed and cry her eyes out, she suddenly found herself face to face with him in one of the draughty corridors. Without a partner for the dance that was then going on, she had taken refuge there and was looking out of a window into the dark alley that skirted one side of the Opera House, when a quick footstep made her turn her head.

"Elspeth!" he said. He had never before used her Christian name. "Not dancing, my dear? This will never do."

"I'm tired," said Elspeth, near to tears. "I don't want to dance."

"Then we shall sit it out." He gave her his arm, and took her through the foyer. She nearly stumbled over the feet of Margaret, who was sitting on a plush sofa with Colonel Baker, and felt Margaret's watchful eyes on her back as she vanished through a door.

"Now," said Derek Galbraith, leading her down another corridor into a small room somewhere at the back of the stage, "you are going to tell me all about it."

She was almost lost with the beloved . . . out of sight and out of hearing of the rest of the world. It was a secret place, no one would ever find them. Heavy dusty curtains of red velvet shut them in. There was a stale smoky smell; a pile of old opera programmes, some musical scores, and a stubbed-out cigar lay on the table. He pushed her gently on to a settee and sat down close to her. "Now, then, Elspeth. What is the matter?"

"Nothing—what should be the matter?" said Elspeth, quaveringly. "It's been a perfectly lovely dance."

"My dear, you're not happy and I'm going to know the reason why. We are friends, aren't we? You do trust me?"

"I don't know," said Elspeth, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Elspeth, my little one . . ." He stooped and kissed the back of her neck. "If you don't stop crying, I shall lose my head."

"Why did you do that? You don't care," she sobbed, helplessly.

"You foolish child," he said, and turning her face to his, kissed her deliberately on the lips.

"It's shameful," thought Elspeth, "shameful and degrading." But she let him take her in his arms and cover her face with kisses. She had not known that it was possible to feel at the same moment such wild joy and such bitter anguish. Fire ran in her veins but her heart was as cold as a stone.

"There!" said Derek Galbraith, releasing her at last. "It's your own fault. Forgive me, please. I did not mean to do that. You've no right to look so lovely and so pathetic." He took out a snowy handkerchief and dried her eyes. "Now don't look at me like that, or I shall kiss you again."

"No . . ." She pushed him away. "Never, never again. I don't care for you any more."

"What! You funny little thing, you know perfectly well you are a little in love with me."

"I am not!" she said. "I see now the whole truth about everything. I might have gone on imagining I cared for you if you hadn't made a mockery of love . . . I believe"—with a sudden flash of intuition—"you kissed me because all the time you were wanting someone else, someone out of reach . . ."

"You little devil!" said Derek Galbraith. "I've never in my life wanted anyone I could not get."

"I see now," went on Elspeth, as if he had not spoken, "that love has nothing to do with all this."

And suddenly she heard, as though it were being played on the strings of her heart, the little phrase that was light as the dew on a flower. Suddenly she saw Monsieur Raab's grave kind face, his piercing eyes . . . "*Que pensez-vous de l'amour, Monsieur?*" She had never dared to ask, but suddenly she knew the little phrase was the answer to her question.

"A letter from Elspeth," said Margaret some weeks afterwards. "Of course she doesn't mention D.G."

"Not even in a postscript?" asked Maud, with a giggle.

"There *is* a postscript," Margaret turned the pages, "but it's nothing. '*Will you tell Monsieur Raab that more than anything I miss his lessons.*' Oh, it went very deep, that affair. She can't even mention his name, poor thing."

"Well, we did our best. We warned her," said Alice.

"Monsieur Raab, indeed! Does she think she can throw dust in our eyes?"

Ach, du lieber Augustin, Augustin, Augustin . . . Ach, du lieber Augustin, alles ist weg, chimed the bells.

★ ★ ★

SIC TRANSIT . . .

I myself saw a poignant sign of the times in a motor showroom one morning last week. A small, forlorn, green, rather old Austin 10 *was being offered for sale. On its windscreen, in whitewashed capitals, was the shy inscription: "Titled Owner."*

ATTICUS, *in The Sunday Times*

FIREWORK DISPLAY

Please to remember
The Fifth of November

The clouds have sprouted orange leaves,
And burn with blossoms made of light;
The wind is harvesting the sheaves
Of flame, across the plains of night.

A forest whistles into being
With smoke for foliage, flames for flowers;
And fire-birds from the branches fleeing
Are spangled with vermilion showers.

Mimosa-shells of golden thunder
Explode above the breathless quays,
And orchards of the fruits of wonder
Invert the green Hesperides.

Out of a sound a star is born:
Out of a star, a galaxy;
Until the blue tiaras dawn
Between the midnight and the sea.

While here, where gondolas go wending
On the Giudecca's gentle breast,
(Black petals of dead stars descending)
The ash of beauty comes to rest.

ROB LYLE, *Fireworks at the Redentore*

Feu de Joie

In childhood the daylight always fails too soon—except when there are going to be fireworks; and then the sun dawdles intolerably on the threshold like a tedious guest. There were no clouds that day, and even after sunset the western sky remained obstinately full of pearl-grey light. It was not so bad for Vin, who was helping his father to pin Catherine-wheels on to the fence and to prop up rocket-sticks in bottles on the lawn; but Judy and Toby, their noses pressed against the inside of the window-panes, were rampant with impatience long before Clem decided that darkness had officially fallen and the show could begin.

Swathed in coats and scarves, they went out and sat in a row on the little flagged terrace. The evening might have been ordered with the fireworks; it was cold, still, and starry, with a

commendable absence of moon. And when the first rocket went up Mrs. Minivèr felt the customary pricking in her throat and knew that once again the enchantment was going to work. Such things—conjurers, ventriloquists, pantomimes—she enjoyed vicariously, by watching the children's enjoyment; but fireworks had for her a direct and magical appeal. Their attraction was more complex than that of any other form of art. They had pattern and sequence, colour and sound, brilliance and mobility; they had suspense, surprise, and a faint hint of danger; above all, they had the supreme quality of transience, which puts the keenest edge on beauty and makes it touch some spring in the heart which more enduring excellences cannot reach.

JAN STRUTHER, *Mrs. Miniver*

Golden Rain

We must have rockets, of course, and again,
Golden Rain was safer than Catherine-wheels,
(These sometimes refused to turn, wouldn't burn,
If the nail was too close to the ladder-end holding them.)
But always the crackers—
(Backarappers they were called)
Meant the fearful joy of jumping aside, as they sprang
Zig-zag after girl, after boy—
Oh, fireworks were fun!
And the mystery of the dank dark garden, unlit
Till the sudden flare of a squib
Showed the mysterious boxes where
Fairy fires waited—we had to be brave
To save squibs to the very end, they would bend,
Nearly (but seldom quite) burning our fingers.
The dark-light pattern lingers
Making an unforgettable design
On a child's heart—that was November . . .

PHYLLIS REID, *Fireworks*

Bonfire Night

. . . and now if Papa was heare I should think myself a perfect pope, though I hope I should not be burnt as there was one at Nell guin's doore the 5th of November, who sate in a great cheare, with a red nose half a yarde long, with some hundreds of boys throwing squibs at it.

DOROTHY OSBORNE, 1627–95,
in a letter to Sir William Temple

Set Pieces

We children were taken to watch the fireworks in the Crystal Palace grounds. We sat on a balcony and gazed, in half-scared wonder, at huge set-pieces of the Armada, of the Battle of Trafalgar, at illuminated portraits of kings and queens and national heroes—and clapped with joy as rockets whizzed upwards, and golden rain and showers of multi-coloured stars cascaded down against the background of a deep violet sky.

KATE TERRY GIELGUD,
An Autobiography

Damp Squib

Bang! A shower of green stars filled the sky. They changed to blue, then red, then silver.

Another and yet another.

"'Oh!' and then 'Ah!' that is what one says," observed Poirot suddenly close to my ear. "At the end it becomes monotonous, do you not find? Brrrr! The grass, it is damp to the feet! I shall suffer for this—a chill. And no possibility of obtaining a proper *tisane*!"

"A chill? On a lovely night like this?"

"A lovely night! A lovely night! You say that, because the rain it does not pour down in sheets! Always when the rain does not fall, it is a lovely night. But I tell you, my friend, if there were a little thermometer to consult you would see."

"Well," I admitted, "I would not mind putting on a coat myself."

"You are very sensible. You have come from a hot climate."

"I'll bring yours."

Poirot lifted first one, then the other foot from the ground with a cat-like motion. "It is the dampness of the feet I fear. Would it, think you, be possible to lay the hands on a pair of goloshes?"

I repressed a smile. "Not a hope," I said. "You understand, Poirot, that it is no longer done."

"Then I shall sit in the house," he declared. "Just for the Guy Fawkes show, shall I only *enrhumer* myself? And catch, perhaps, a *fluxion de poitrine*?"

Poirot still murmuring indignantly, we bent our footsteps towards the house. Loud clapping drifted up to us from the quay below where another set piece was being shown—a ship, I believe, with *Welcome to Our Visitors* displayed across it.

AGATHA CHRISTIE,
Peril at End House

★ *In this second extract from John Steinbeck's forthcoming novel, "Sweet Thursday," which continues the story of "Cannery Row" and its varied and lovable inhabitants, Fauna, the warm-hearted proprietress of the Bear Flag, takes matters into her capable and kindly hands, in another attempt to bring Doc and Suzy together.*

SWEET THURSDAY

by JOHN STEINBECK

LOOKING backward in time, you can usually find the day it started, the day of Sarajevo, the day of Munich, the moment of Stalingrad or Valley Forge. You fix the day and the hour by some incident that happened to yourself. You remember exactly what you were doing when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour.

There is no doubt that forces were in motion on that Thursday in Cannery Row. Some of the causes and directions have been in process for generations. There are always some people who claim they felt it coming. Those who remember say it felt like earthquake weather.

It was a Thursday, and it was one of those days in Monterey when the air is washed and polished like a lens, so that you can see the houses in Santa Cruz twenty miles across the bay and you can see the redwood trees on a mountain above Watsonville. The stone point of Frémont's Peak, clear the other side of Salinas, stands up nobly against the east. The sunshine had a goldy look, and red geraniums burnt the air around them. The delphiniums were like little openings in the sky.

Fauna always drew the blinds of her bedroom tight down. Because of the late hours of business, she had to sleep until noon to get her proper rest. On the morning of Sweet Thursday the sun played a trick on her. The window-blind had a hole in it no bigger than the point of a pin. The playful sun picked up the doings of Cannery Row, pushed them through the pinhole, turned them upside-down, and projected them in full colour on the wall of Fauna's bedroom.

Wide Ida waddled across the wall upside-down, wearing a print dress strewn with red poppies and on her head a black beret. The Pacific Gas & Electric truck rolled across her wall upside-down, its wheels in the air. Mack strode towards the

grocery, head down. And a little later, Doc, weary, feet over his head, walked along the wallpaper, carrying a quart of beer that would have spilt if it had not been an illusion. At first Fauna tried to go back to sleep, but she was afraid she might miss something. It was the little coloured ghost of upside-down Doc that drew her from her couch.

It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it. And this had happened to Fauna. She was glad when she raised the blind and saw how beautiful was the day. The roof of the Hediondo Cannery where seagulls had perched glowed like a pearl.

Fauna brushed her hair severely back and put on a close-fitting hat of black sequins. She wore her dark grey knitted suit and carried gloves. In the kitchen she put six bottles of beer in a paper bag, and then, as an afterthought, she rooted out one of the shrunken monkey-heads—souvenirs of her days in South America—as a present. When she climbed the stairs of the Western Biological Laboratory and stood at the top, puffing a little, you might have thought she was soliciting for the Red Cross instead of for the Bear Flag.

Doc was frying sausages, sprinkling a little chocolate over them. It gave them an odd and oriental flavour, he thought.

"You're up early," he greeted Fauna.

"I figured one quart of beer wouldn't last long."

"It didn't," said Doc. "Have a couple of sausages?"

"Don't mind if I do," said Fauna. For she knew that he who gives to you is in debt to you. "This here's a monkey-head that I picked up on my travels."

"Interesting," said Doc.

"You know, there's some folks think they're people's heads," said Fauna.

"Don't see how they could. See the shape of the eyes and ears? Look at the nose."

"Oh, some folks don't look at people very close," said Fauna. "I'll have a bottle of beer with you."

The taste of the chocolate sausages intrigued her. "I never tasted nothing like it," she observed. "Did you ever eat grasshoppers, Doc?"

"Yes," said Doc. "In Mexico. They're kind of peppery."

Fauna was not one to beat about bushes. "You must get sick of everybody wanting something from you," she said.

Doc smiled at her. "I'd be sicker if they didn't," he said. "What can I do for you? Say, thanks for the cake and the beer last night!"

Fauna asked, " What did you think of Suzy? "

" Strange," said Doc. " Somehow I can't see her working at the Bear Flag."

" Neither can I," said Fauna. " She ain't no good at it but it looks like I'm stuck with her. The trouble with Suzy is she's got a streak of lady in her and I don't know how to root it out."

Doc munched his sausages and sipped his beer thoughtfully.

" I never thought of it, but I suppose that could be a drawback," he said.

" She's a nice kid," said Fauna. " I like her fine. But she's a liability in a business way."

" Why don't you kick her out? "

" Oh, I can't," said Fauna. " She's had a tough time. I never had no gift for kicking people out. What I'd like is if she'd get up and go. She's got no future as a floozy. She's a character. That ain't no good in a house."

" She slapped me in the face with a few basic truths," said Doc. " That's a quick eye she's got."

" And a quicker tongue," said Fauna. " Would you do me a favour? "

" Why, of course," said Doc. " Anything I can."

" I can't go to nobody else," Fauna went on, " they wouldn't understand."

" What is it? "

" Doc," said Fauna, " I've knocked around and seen all kinds. I tell you, if you've got a streak of lady in you it spoils you for anything else. Now, you never come over to the Bear Flag. You play the field. I personally think that costs more but I ain't one to mess around with the way people want to live."

" I don't think I'm following you," said Doc.

" O.K., I'll show my hand. When you're making a play for one of them babes, them amateurs, you got to do quite a lot of talking before you make the grade—ain't that right? "

Doc smiled ruefully.

" Right," he said.

" Well, do you always mean every word of it? "

Doc pinched his lower lip. " Why—why—I guess right at the moment I do."

" But afterwards? "

" Afterwards, if I were to think about it—"

" That's what I mean," said Fauna. " So if you happen to tell a little teesy-beensy bit of boloney, you don't blow your brains out."

" You'd do well in the analysis business," said Doc. " What do you want me to do? "

"Doc, would it do you any harm to make a play for Suzy? I mean, like you do with them dames that come in here."

"What good could that possibly do?" he asked.

"Well, maybe I'm wrong, but the way I figure it, if you made a pitch for the kid, like she was a lady, why, she might turn lady on you."

"I still can't see what good it would do," said Doc.

"It would get her out of the Bear Flag," said Fauna. "She wouldn't want to congregate with no more floozies."

"How about me?" said Doc.

"You don't marry them others, do you?"

"No, but—"

"Take a whang at her, will you, Doc?" Fauna begged. "Can't do you no harm. Why, she might scram out of here and take up typewriting or telephone operating. Will you do that for me, Doc?"

He said, "It doesn't seem honest."

Fauna changed her tack. "I was talking to her last night and she said she couldn't remember when a guy had treated her like a girl. What harm would that do?"

"Might make her miserable."

"Might make her fly the coop."

"Maybe she likes it the way it is."

"She don't. I tell you she's a blowed-in-the-glass lady. Look, Doc, you take her out to dinner and I'll buy the dinner. Just be nice to her."

"I'll have to think about it."

"Think you might do it?"

"I might."

"She's a good kid if you treat her right. You'd be doing me a big favour."

"Suppose she won't go?"

"She will. I won't give her no choice."

Doc looked out of the window and a warmth crept through him, and suddenly he felt better than he could ever remember feeling.

"I'll think about it," he said.

"I'll throw in three bottles of champagne whenever you say the word," said Fauna.

Later, Fauna and the girls called formally at the Palace Flophouse in answer to the note Mack and the boys had sent, asking them to drink a jolt of good stuff. Suzy did not attend. She had been quiet all morning, and then she mooned away on the path that leads along the sea to the lighthouse on Point Pinos.

She looked in the tidal pools, and she picked a bunch of the tiny flowers that grow as close to the ocean as they can. Suzy was restless and unhappy. She felt excitement and nausea at the same time. She wanted to smile and she wanted to cry and she was scared and happy and hopeless. Doc had asked her to have dinner with him, at Sonny Boy's on the pier, and Fauna had urged her to go. Suzy's first reaction had been violent. " I won't do it! " she said.

" Sure you'll go," said Fauna. " I may have to persuade you with a indoor-ball bat—but you'll go."

" You can't make me."

" Want to test that? Why, I've wore my brain down to the knuckles, trying to do something nice for you."

" I ain't got nothing to wear," said Suzy.

" Neither has Doc. If he can go like he does, what right've you to get grand? "

" But heck, Fauna, he's—he's got it inside. People like me have got to put on a show because they've got nothing else. I'm afraid I'll turn mean because I don't know how to be nice."

" Suzy," said Fauna, " I'm going to give you a piece of advice, and if you won't take it, I may just call Constable Joe Blaikey and get you floated right out of town. Don't throw the first punch! Wait'll you're hit before you put up your fists. Most of the time nobody ain't laid a glove on you."

" Suppose I could wear my suit? It's got a big spot," said Suzy.

" Ask Joe Elegant to spot-clean it and press it. Tell him I said so."

And thus it was that Suzy went walking out lighthouse-way on Sweet Thursday.

At four-thirty in the afternoon Fauna ordered Suzy to the office bedroom with full field equipment. Suzy dumped her clothes on Fauna's bed.

" That's a fine way to keep wrinkles out," Fauna observed. She picked up the grey woollen skirt and jacket, laid them out, inspected them for spots, smelt them for cleaning fluid. " Nice piece of goods," she said.

" Community chest," said Suzy. " I was in the charity ward."

" Well, somebody wasn't." Her eyes noted the brown shoes. She went to the door and yelled, " Joe, Joe Elegant! "

He looked in. " I'm not supposed to be on duty," he said.

" I'm a thorn in the flesh of the worker," said Fauna. " You run up the street to Wildock's and get new heeltaps on these here. Tell them to fix this scuffed place and give them a nice shine. Wait and bring them back."

Joe complained as he went, but he went.

Fauna said to Suzy, " You got any gloves? "

" No."

" I'll lend you some. Here—these white ones. And here's a handkerchief. I don't want no lipstick marks on it. Now, you listen to me, Suzy girl—take care of your shoes, wear clean gloves, carry a white handkerchief, and keep your stocking seams straight. If you do that you can get away with murder. This here's a nice suit—the kind of cloth that the older it gets the better it looks—if your heels ain't run over. Call Becky in! "

When Becky entered, Fauna said, " Ain't you got a white piqué dicky and cuffs? "

" I've just done them up."

" I want you to lend them to Suzy. Get some thread and sew the cuffs in this here jacket."

" She'll have to wash them afterwards."

" She will."

While Becky basted in the cuffs Fauna said, " Turn out your purse, Suzy." She inspected the pile on the bed. " You don't need that aspirin. Here, take my comb—throw that one away. Ain't nothing tackier than a comb with missing teeth. Put these here tissues in. Here, use my compact and touch up the shine on your nose once in a while. Let's see your nails! Hmmm, pretty good. You washed your hair? "

" Get her a wig," said Becky, and she bit the thread.

" Don't get smart. Come on, now—get off your behind and do something with her hair, and not fancy neither."

To Suzy she said, " Becky's got a light hand with hair. You can't take that coat. The community chest slipped up there."

She tapped her teeth with a pencil and then went to her closet and brought out two baum martens that were biting each other's heads off. " Just hang these here bo' martens over your shoulder," Fauna said. " And if you lose them or hurt them, I'll cut your throat. Now, where are we? No perfume. Douse some of this Florida water on—kind of old-fashioned and young-smelling."

Becky stood behind Suzy's chair, brushing and combing and moulding. " She's got big ears," Becky said. " Maybe I can kind of hide them a little."

" You've got a nice hand with hair," Fauna said.

The final briefing took place at six o'clock, with the bedroom door closed.

" Turn round," said Fauna. " Keep your ankles close together. Now, walk! That's good. You got a real nice walk. Like I said, you're a good-looking kid if you work at it a little."

Suzy looked at herself in the mirror and she smiled, for it

seemed to her that she really was pretty, and the idea startled her and pleased her too, and when she looked pleased she was even prettier. Then her mouth turned down and blind panic came over her.

" What's the matter? " Fauna demanded.

" What can I talk about? Fauna, I don't want to go! I don't belong with a guy like Doc. Fauna, tell him I'm sick. I ain't going."

Fauna let her talk herself out and then she said quietly, " Maybe you'd like to cry now and get your eyes red after all my trouble? Go on, cry! "

" I'm sorry," said Suzy. " You been nice. I ain't no good, Fauna. You're just wasting your time. I know what I'll do —the minute he says something I don't understand, I'll get angry. I'm scared."

" 'Course, you're scared," said Fauna. " But if you didn't care nothing about Doc, you wouldn't be scared. You didn't invent it. There ain't never been no dame went out first time with a guy she liked that wasn't scared. But Doc's all right. He gets what he wants. My sister Dora said every girl made a play for him. I put a stop to that."

" Why'd you do that? " Suzy asked.

" I'm saving him—that's why. You look at them gold stars over there—every star, one of my girls has married well."

Suzy said, " Who marries hustlers? "

" Now, that's a bad attitude to take," Fauna said. " If I was twenty-two, with your face and shape and what I know, there wouldn't be no man in the world could get away! I've got the know-how—but that's all I've got. Oh, well! I'm going to tell you a few thousand things, Suzy, so that if you would listen you'd get anything you want. But you won't listen! Nobody listens, and when they learn the hard way, it's too late. Maybe it's a good thing—I don't know."

" I'll listen."

" Sure, but you won't learn. You know, Suzy, there ain't no way in the world to get in trouble by keeping your mouth shut. You look back at every mess you ever got in and you'll find your tongue started it."

" That's true," said Suzy. " But I can't seem to stop."

" You've got to learn it like you learn anything else—just practice. The next thing is opinions. You and me is always busting out with opinions. Heck, Suzy, we ain't got no opinions! We just say stuff we've heard or seen in the movies. We're scared we'll miss something like running for a bus. That's the second rule: lay off opinions because you ain't really got any."

" You've got them numbered, huh? " said Suzy.

" I should write a book," said Fauna. " *If She Could, I Could.* Now take number three. There don't hardly nobody listen, and it's so easy! You don't have to do nothing when you listen. If you do listen, it's pretty interesting. If a guy says something that pricks up your interest, why, don't hide it from him. Kind of try to wonder what he's thinking instead of how you're going to answer him back."

" You're sure putting the finger on me," Suzy said softly.

" I've only got a little more, but it's the hardest of all, and the easiest."

" What number? "

" I've lost track. Don't pretend to be something you ain't, and don't make like you know something you don't, or sooner or later you'll sure take a fall. And there's one more part to this one, whatever number it is: there ain't nobody was ever insulted by a question. S'pose Doc says something and you don't know what it means. Ask him! The nicest thing in the world you can do for anybody is let them help you."

Suzy was silent, looking down at her hands.

Fauna said, " You've got nice nails. How do you keep them so nice? "

Suzy said, " That's easy. My grandma taught me. You keep an old lemon rind, and every time you wash your hands you scrounge your finger-nails around in it. And then you shake a little face powder on your hand and you polish your nails on the ham of your hand and you push down the quick with a little piece of lemon wood."

" See what I mean? " said Fauna.

" What? "

" I just asked you a question."

Suzy blushed. " I sure fell into that."

" No, you didn't. I wanted to know. It's best if you ask when you want to know."

" Thanks," said Suzy. " You're a wonderful dame. I wonder if I could learn? "

" You can if you just remember a lot of things: first, you've got to remember you're Suzy and you ain't nobody else but Suzy. Then you've got to remember that Suzy is a good thing—a real valuable thing—and there ain't nothing like it in the world. It don't do no harm just to say that to yourself. Then, when you got that, remember that there's a lot Suzy don't know. The only way she can find out is if she sees it, or reads it, or asks it. Most people don't look at nothing but themselves."

" What's the next thing? " Suzy asked.

"I'm proud of you!" Fauna said. "You listened. The third thing you'll have to do some thinking about. Nobody don't give a particular damn about Suzy one way or the other. It's hard to get them thinking about you because they're too busy thinking about themselves. There's two, three copper-bottom ways to get their attention: talk about them. If you see something nice or good or pretty, tell them. Don't make it a fake, though. Don't fight nobody unless there ain't no other way. Don't never start a fight, and if one starts, let it get going good before you jump in. Best way in the whole world to defend yourself is to keep your fists down!

"Now, when you've got their attention, the first thing they want is to do something for you. Let them. Don't get proud and say you don't need it or want it. That's a slap in the face. The thing people like most in the world is to give you something and have you like it and need it. That ain't sloppy. That works. You give it a try."

"You think Doc would fall for that stuff?"

"Just give it a try."

Suzy said, "Fauna, didn't you never get married?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Fauna smiled. "By the time I learnt what I just told you, it was too late."

"I love you," said Suzy.

"Now you see! You've got me softened up like butter. I want you to keep them furs."

"But—"

"Watch it!"

"Yeah, I see. I sure do thank you. And would you maybe write down all that stuff so I can get it by heart?"

"Sure I will. Now, look Suzy—tonight, just before you say something, say it first to yourself, and kind of polish it up."

"You mean cussing?"

"I mean cussing and I mean—well, sometimes if you look at it you don't say it. A whole lot that passes for talk is just running off at the mouth. I guess you're about ready now."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Fauna?"

"Yes. I want you to repeat after me, 'I'm Suzy and nobody else.'"

"I'm Suzy and nobody else."

"'I'm a good thing.'"

"I'm a good thing."

"'There ain't nothing like me in the whole world.'"

"There ain't —Damn it, Fauna, now my eyes'll be red!"

" They look pretty that way," said Fauna.

At seven o'clock Doc, dressed in an open-collared shirt, leather jacket, and Army pants, rang the bell at the Bear Flag. He looked at Suzy and he said, " I've got to make a telephone call, do you mind? " And he ran back to the Laboratory.

Ten minutes later he returned. He had on clean slacks, a tweed jacket, and a tie he hadn't used for years.

Fauna saw him standing under the porch light. " Honey," she said to Suzy, " you win the first round on points."

Sonny Boy is truly the only Greek born in America named Sonny Boy. He operates a restaurant and bar on the wharf in Monterey. Sonny Boy is plump and getting plumper. Although he was born near Sutro Park in San Francisco and went to school there, Sonny Boy has single-handedly kept alive the mystery of the Near East. His perfectly round face hints at the Orient Express and beautiful spies. His bushy voice is congenitally confidential. Sonny Boy can say good evening and make it sound like an international plot. His restaurant makes friends for him and supports him.

Perhaps Sonny Boy, in one sense, wears a long black cape and dines with Balkan countesses where two seas kiss the Golden Horn—but he also runs a good restaurant. He probably knows more secrets than any man in the community, for his martinis are a combination truth-serum and lie-detector. *Veritas* is not only *in vino* but regularly batters its way out.

Doc stopped his old car in front of Sonny Boy's, got out, walked round, opened the other door, and helped Suzy out. She was a little shocked but she remained silent. The sentence, " You think I'm a cripple, for heaven's sake? " rose to her throat, but she followed Fauna's advice—whispered it, and pushed it back. The fact of his hand on her elbow did a magic thing to her, pushed back her shoulders and raised her chin. The gritty light of resistance went out of her eyes.

Doc opened the door of the bar and stood aside to let Suzy enter. The regulars on the stools turned to look. The eyes crept from pretty face to pretty legs, took in the martens on the way. For one second, panic halted her, but she saw no look of recognition in the eyes of the regulars.

Sonny Boy turned sideways to get round the end of the bar. " Evening, folks," he said. " Your table is ready. Would you like to have a cocktail here, or shall I send one over? "

" Oh, let's sit at the table," said Doc.

Sonny Boy bowed Suzy through the door to the restaurant, and she strolled ahead with her nice walk. Sonny Boy, rolling

along beside Doc, said in his conspiratorial whisper, " Your secretary called. It's all fixed. You got a secretary, Doc? "

Doc overcame his surprise. " Part-time," he said.

" Who's the lady? She new around here? "

" She's new round here," said Doc. He caught up with Suzy.

" This way," said Sonny Boy. He led them to a round table in front of the stone fire-place. A pine fire crackled and sent out its fragrance. The table had a centrepiece of wild iris. The breadsticks stood like soldiers in their glasses. The napkins were folded to make little crowns. It was the best table in the house, private, but downstage and well lighted.

Suzy's eyes darted around the room. No other table had flowers. Something wonderful happened to Suzy. She didn't walk round the table and sit down. She waited, and when Doc held her chair she seated herself, looked smiling up at him, and said, " Thank you."

Sonny Boy hovered over the table. " Good you telephoned," he said. " I had trouble getting pompano, but I got it. How about a cocktail? The wine's cooling."

Doc said, " One time I had some kind of—"

" I remember! " said Sonny Boy. " A martini made with chartreuse instead of vermouth. Very good."

" Very effective, as I remember it," said Doc. " Two doubles."

" Coming right up," said Sonny Boy. " I told Tony to be here to play piano like you said, but he's sick."

Doc looked at Suzy to see whether she knew Fauna had made the arrangements. She didn't.

It is probable that if Doc hadn't ordered the special martinis, he would have got them anyway. They arrived with a speed that indicated they were already mixed.

The shock of wearing a tie was leaving Doc. He looked across the table and smiled at Suzy, and he wondered, What is beauty in a girl, that it can come and go? This Suzy did not faintly resemble the tough hustler who had screamed at him the night before. He raised the cocktail glass. " You're pretty," he said. " I'm glad you came with me. Here's to both of us."

Suzy swallowed a gulp, held back her tears, and waited for the spasm to pass.

" I should have warned you," said Doc, " there's a rumour that this drink is made of rattlesnake venom and raw opium."

Suzy got her breath. " It's good," she said. " But I was watching its right hand and walked into a left hook! "

Her mind cried, I shouldn't have said that! I forgot already. Then she saw Doc's amusement and it was all right.

Suzy noticed a waiter drifting delicately within earshot. She

had discovered something for herself. When in doubt, move slowly. Her head turned towards the waiter and he drifted away. She was delighted with her discovery—everything-in-slow-motion. She lifted her glass slowly, looked at it carefully, then sipped, and held it a moment before she put it down. S-l-o-w-ness—it gave meaning to everything. It made everything royal. She remembered how all the unsure and worried people she knew jumped and picked and jittered. Just doing everything slowly, forcing herself, she felt a new kind of security. Don't forget, she told herself. Don't ever forget this. Slow! Slow!

Doc gave her a cigarette and held a match, and she leaned forward so slowly that the flame was touching his fingers before she had lit it. A lovely warmth stole through her body. She felt bold, not defensively bold, but safe.

She asked, " Do they know—what I am? "

Martinis work equally on all. Doc said, " They know you're with me. That's all they need to know. Shall we have one more? "

It came before he got his finger raised for attention. If this was conspiracy, Sonny Boy wanted to be in on it. If felicity, he liked that too.

" I like a fire," Suzy said. " Once we had a fire-place where I lived."

Doc said, " You're pretty. Yes, by George! You're pretty! "

Suzy swallowed the first words that rose and swallowed the second ones and ended by dropping her eyes and saying, " Thank you," softly.

Sonny Boy personally escorted the waiter, who carried the ice-bucket with the chilled Chablis. Then he stood back and surveyed the table.

" How is everything, Doc? "

" Just fine," said Doc.

" You ready to eat? "

" Any time," said Doc.

And Suzy's discovery continued to hold good: take it slow and keep your eyes open and your mouth shut.

The cold, cracked crab, the pompano, was new to her, and it required an eating technique she didn't know. She did everything a little behind Doc and he wasn't conscious that she watched every move he made.

When champagne and fruit and cheese arrived, Suzy knew she had to be alone. A thought so overwhelming had come to her, that the blood pounded in her temples. Slow, she warned herself. Take it easy. She looked at the leaping flames and then pivoted her head to Doc. " Will you excuse . . . ? "

" Of course! " He jumped up and drew back her chair. Suzy moved regally toward the Ladies' Room. She could not feel her feet against the floor.

Doc watched her passage. Strange, strange, he thought. What is it? " Maidenly " is the word. A kind of lonely and terrible modesty. What has made the change? Then he thought, it's an act. Fauna coached her. But he knew that wasn't true. Acting couldn't get into the eyes like that. Coaching couldn't draw the blood to her cheeks. He spun the champagne bottle in its bucket, and he found himself wishing she would hurry back. His eyes found a window that reflected the door to the Ladies' Room.

Behind that door Suzy stared at herself in the mirror and she didn't know the face. She thought of the dinner. " I hate fish," she said out loud. " It makes me break out. But I ain't broke out."

Finally she was ready to inspect the thought that had sent her out: the symbol, the mystery, the signpost with an inexorable pointing finger. Fauna had cast their horoscopes—hers and Doc's —and now it was all so plain no one could miss it. Fate was not only pointing the way but booting from behind. She thought of the dishes being taken away: the heaped legs and claws of crab and . . . They had eaten their horoscopes! Cancer and Pisces—fish and crab.

" Good lord! " she said, and she was limp in the hands of Fate.

Sonny Boy came to the table. " Everything all right? "

" Fine," said Doc.

" Just like you ordered? "

" Huh? "

" Like your secretary told me."

" Fine," said Doc, " just the way I wanted it."

When Suzy came back, she was dedicated. You can only fight Fate so far, and once you've given in to it, you're very strong, because all your force flows in one direction.

Doc held her chair and then he popped the champagne cork and smelt it.

Suzy said, " Can I have it? "

" Of course."

She turned the cork in her fingers and looked at it. It was very beautiful. She put it in her purse and took an iris from the vase.

" Do you like champagne? "

" I love it," she said and wondered what it would taste like. And she did love it.

Doc said, " You know, out in the sand dunes there are little valleys covered with pines. Some time, when you can, let's take meat and things out there and cook our supper. It's very nice."

" The fire reminded you," said Suzy.

" That's clever of you—so it did."

She said, " Doc, will you some time teach me about the stuff you've got in your place? "

" Sure I will." A surge of affection filled him. But he was a little afraid too of her terrible modesty. He looked away from her eyes to the wild iris in her hand. " There's an old Welsh story," he said. " It's about a poor knight who made a wife completely out of flowers—"

The wine was strong in Suzy now. She said the sentence twice to herself before she said it aloud to Doc. " I hope she didn't wilt."

The low voice inside Doc burst through at last. " I'm lonely," he said. He said it as a simple matter of fact and he said it in wonder. Then he apologized. " I guess I'm a little drunk." He felt very shy. He filled the glasses. " What the hell! Let's have some brandy, too."

Suzy turned half away from him so that her face was outlined in leaping pine flames. " You know that place you said—out in the sand dunes? "

" Yes."

" Could we look at it? "

" Whenever you want."

" On our way home? "

" You'll ruin your shoes."

" I know," said Suzy.

" You could take them off."

" I will," said Suzy.

Not everyone believes that Friday is unlucky, but nearly everybody agrees it is a waiting day.

Fauna knocked and entered the Western Biological Laboratory. She flicked her hand at the rattlesnakes. " How do you feel, Doc? "

" All right."

" Get drunk? "

" A little."

" How was the dinner? "

" Wonderful. You know what to order."

" I ought to. Say, you want to beat about the bush, or shall we have it straight? See what I mean about her? "

" Yes. How does she feel? "

" She ain't up yet."

" I'm going collecting."

" Want me to tell her that? "

" Why should you? Wait—I've got her purse. Want to take it to her? "

" Look, she ain't crippled. Maybe she'll want to get it herself."

" I won't be here."

" You'll be back."

" Say," he said, " what *is* this? "

She knew he might turn angry now. " I've got a lot to do. You ain't mad at me? "

" Why should I be? "

" Well, if you need anything, let me know."

" Fauna—" he began. " Oh, let it go."

" What do you want? "

" I was going to ask you something—but I don't want to know."

Suzy was hunched over a cup of coffee when Fauna got back.

" Morning," said Fauna. And then, " I said good morning."

" Oh yeah," said Suzy. " Morning."

" Look at me! "

" Why not? " Suzy raised her eyes.

" You can look down now," said Fauna.

" You don't know nothing," said Suzy.

" O.K., I don't know nothing. When did I ever get nosy with you? Joe," she called, " bring me a cup of coffee! " She slid a bottle of aspirins across the oilcloth table-cover.

" Thanks." Suzy took three and washed them down with coffee.

" He's going out collecting bugs," said Fauna quietly.

" You went over there? "

" I met him in the street. Have a nice time? "

Suzy looked up at her with eyes so wide that she seemed to be turned inside out. " He didn't make no pass," she said breathlessly. " We went out on the sand dunes and he didn't make no pass."

Fauna smiled. " But he talked nice? "

" Didn't talk much, but he talked nice."

" That's good."

" Maybe I'm nuts, Fauna, but I told him."

" Oh, you ain't nuts."

" I told him everything. He didn't even ask."

Fauna asked quietly, " What did he talk about? "

" He said there was a fella in old times made a wife out of flowers."

" What for, for heaven's sake? "

" Well, I don't know. But it was all right when he said it."

" What else did he say? "

Suzy spoke slowly. " Out in the sand dunes I did most of the talking. But he give me a boost every now and then when I run down."

Fauna said, " He can do that better than anybody."

Suzy's eyes were shining with excitement. " I almost forgot," she said. " I never took no stock in stars and stuff like that, but you know what we had for dinner? "

" Champagne? "

" Fish and crab! " said Suzy. " Remember what you said, how I'm fish and he's crab? "

Fauna turned her head away. " I got something tickling my nose," she said. " I wonder if I'm catching cold."

" Do you think that's a sign, Fauna? Do you? "

" Everything's signs," said Fauna. " Everything."

There was a glory in Suzy's eyes. " Right after we ate, we was talking, and he said, ' I'm lonely.' "

" That ain't like him," Fauna said, " that's a dirty trick! "

" No," Suzy contradicted her. " He didn't say it like that. He said it like it was pushed out of him. It surprised him, like he didn't know he was going to say it. What do you think, Fauna? Tell me, what do you think? "

" I think there's going to be a new gold star."

Further chapters from John Steinbeck's " Sweet Thursday " will appear in next month's Argosy on sale November 10.

★ ★ ★

EVENING

The shadows ladder out. And lance-like
Over the slow reluctant gold-glue river
The dragonfly's gonfalon, like a shout,
Glances blue through the shiver
And fidget of midges that flag the flow
Far below. Look! what jag did it fling
As it stopped? What jibe deliver
As it stared there entranced? Yet at once
Its daring's forgot. In a flash it goes off,
In a sliver. O it cares not a thing. Air
Is its only knowing, its foe and forgiver.

W. R. RODGERS

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NOTE ON DANGER B

by GERALD KERSH

DOCTOR SANT says that he and Captain Mayo exceeded 1000 miles an hour in the jet-propelled F.S.2 on 11 April 1945. The fact has yet to be confirmed. Danger A was established as a réal danger in October 1946. Sober scientists have not yet fully acknowledged the existence of what Dr. Sant calls Danger B.

The suppressed pages of the Sant Report are curiously interesting, however. They bring back into memory one of the most remarkable theories ever put forward by an established mathematician. The mathematician was Berliner, who died in 1910. The work to which Dr. Sant refers is formidably entitled: *Living Cells and their Relation to Time; with a Note on Time so far as Time is United with Velocity and Space.* It was written by Berliner, revised and indexed by Wasserman in 1911, and published by Frischauer in 1912, in Vienna. Only 350 copies of this book were printed. It is extremely rare. There is a copy in the library of the British Museum, and another in the Bodleian Library.

After two years of departmental wire-pulling and patient waiting, I have been granted permission to publish the suppressed pages of the Sant Report, which the War Department filed away as " Secret " in April 1945. This is the document of which General Branch said: " It surely must be the most astounding thing of its kind that ever has been or ever will be written."

By " of its kind," General Branch meant " of the official kind, written by a responsible scientist in the proper language, and formally handed in to the proper authorities."

For the report was written by Dr. Sant. It deals with the first flight of the jet-propelled F.S.2, and with two of the dangers that threaten the flier who wants to cover too many miles a minute. He refers to them as Danger A and Danger B. Nobody had thought of them until Doctor Sant wrote that brief, brusque,

and utterly sensational report. The possibility of Danger A may have occurred to one or two of the more imaginative scientists. But no scientist could ever have considered or even dreamt of the possibility of Danger B. The War Department kept it quiet, because at that time the fact was not established, and seemed, indeed, unverifiable.

But it now appears that some crumbs of evidence scraped out of the smouldering wreckage of a machine that crashed in Montana have given the experts cause to think again.

Danger A has to be overcome when the flier catches up with sound and touches 700 miles an hour. Then your hurtling metal machine crushes the vague atmosphere into something hard—much as a manufacturing chemist's press squeezes fine, loose amorphous powder into an aspirin tablet. In effect, you put up a brick wall of compressed air and smash yourself in knocking it down. And so a shower of scorched and twisted metal comes back to earth.

This was to be tragically demonstrated by just such a catastrophe over England, in October 1946. Doctor Sant had seen the possibility of such mishaps as long ago as 1934, when he had already evolved a sound theory of jet propulsion and had even made a blueprint of a workable jet-propelled machine which he called F.S.1. The letters F.S. stood for Flying Spade simply because the outlines of Sant's machine, in 1934, were reminiscent of the ace of spades. These outlines were modified by 1945; by which time—having been lucky and adroit enough to get moral, financial, technical, and official support—he was building F.S.2, in which he and Captain Mayo made a test flight.

F.S.2 looked like the head of a harpoon; it had an appearance of keenness and complete efficiency. A fabulously wealthy motor-car manufacturer, whose name I may not mention, financed the experiment, with the approval of the War Department, and so F.S.2 was put together secretly somewhere in Nevada. It was finished before the end of March 1945—the necessities of war had mothered inventions which made this possible.

F.S.2 took off on its first serious flight on 11 April 1945. This happened to be Doctor Sant's fifty-second birthday—a fact difficult to believe. In spite of his white hair, Doctor Sant looks like a well-preserved athlete on the right side of forty; an athlete of the agile, slender kind—a runner and a jumper. Yet he boasts that he has not taken a stroke of exercise in thirty-five years. He attributes his vigour and his youthful appearance to the fact that he never drank alcohol, never smoked cigarettes, and never got married, but lived only for his work.

"I gave myself completely to work," he says. "That is as

good a way as any of staying young. Friends, enemies, wives, and children—they just weren't for me. They'd have torn me to bits like four wild horses. Life hasn't marked me up, because I haven't had time to live it. I've just worked all the time. Although," he adds, laughing, "work can mark you up a bit, too"—and he points to his nose, which is very badly broken. He did not get this injury in any romantic way; in 1943 he was hit by a piece of flying steel when something exploded in his laboratory. "Still, it doesn't cut half as deep or hurt half as much as a sad man's wrinkle," said Doctor Sant.

Captain Mayo was born in Pasadena in August 1919. He is one of those flying prodigies peculiar to our time, for whom the whirling earth is too slow and boggy. He could take a car to pieces and put it together again before he was fifteen years old. Above all things he loves speed—speed for speed's sake. He resents the tyranny of the law of gravity; he wants to get away from everything that clutches man's feet. Therefore he, too, is still unmarried. In his business it is better to be a bachelor. The perils of mad speed in the upper air are fantastically incalculable—as Doctor Sant's nightmarish report clearly indicates.

I should say, in passing, that Doctor Sant overcame Danger A by a bold—almost a foolhardy—application of what he called the gun-and-candle principle. This principle is as old as the hills. Fire a soft wax candle from a smooth-bore gun, and the power behind it will send that candle right through an oak plank. Similarly, a fine needle embedded in a cork and struck smartly with a hammer will pierce a tough bronze penny—a needle that would snap if you tried to push it through a fold of canvas. Furthermore, Sant did not attempt to achieve his highest speed until F.S.2 was up on the lower curve of the stratosphere, thus eliminating some of the danger of air resistance.

Sant and Mayo took off on 11 April 1945, at nine o'clock in the morning. They were back on the airfield about fifty-five minutes later. Something had gone wrong with their speed indicator. This instrument was designed to record speed up to 1000 miles an hour. It was broken. Doctor Sant says that it broke when F.S.2 reached the speed of 1250 miles an hour or thereabouts. I state the figures exactly as they are recorded in the report. They are questionable, because the indicator stopped working. In certain quarters there is no doubt at all that Sant and Mayo on that occasion travelled faster than any human beings had ever travelled before.

Doctor Sant was proud and, for him, excited.

Captain Mayo was ashamed; he had blacked out, or become

momentarily unconscious, as they turned to come back. He wanted a cup of coffee. But, to everybody's astonishment, the first thing that Doctor Sant said when he set foot on the ground was, " Has somebody got a mirror?."

Somebody had a mirror. He looked at his reflection; explored his broken nose with anxious fingers; said: " Ha! " and went to his office, shouting: " Berliner! Berliner! Berliner! "

He stayed there for three hours, reading a book and making notes on a little blue scribbling-pad.

That evening Doctor Sant wrote his report. The War Department cut out every reference to Danger B.

But now, after two years, the ban is lifted, and I may give you the substance of what Doctor Sant wrote. In the original document, Doctor Sant quoted certain figures and formulas which it is at present pointless to print. The formulas, particularly, contribute nothing to the story as it may be understood by the man in the street, for whom this is written. Doctor Sant's figures take us into the higher mathematics—into the esoteric mathematics that made headlines when Einstein first made news.

Anyone who understands the theory of Berliner—and only five men in the world can make head or tail of this theory—may work out for himself exactly what Doctor Sant was driving at. But any schoolboy may grasp the broader aspects of the suppressed part of his report, dated 11 April 1945, handed in on the morning of April twelfth.

. . . . I am aware, Doctor Sant wrote, that the failure of the indicator discredits my claim to having travelled at over 1000 miles an hour. Nevertheless, having tested every instrument with the utmost care, I am convinced that the indicator broke down because of the excessive strain imposed upon it by the speed achieved by F.S.2. I cannot support this claim, yet I am satisfied that Captain Mayo and I, on this occasion, broke every existing speed record. Similarly, there is no way in which I can confirm Danger B, which I believe to be a real danger.

For the sake of investigators who will take up F.S.3 and F.S.4, I believe it is my duty to relate events as I experienced them.

I had overcome Danger A, and—according to the indicator—had touched 875 miles an hour. The coughing and roaring of the jet had died away, and there was a peculiar quiet. If it had not been for the flickering of the indicator needles and the vibration of F.S.2, it would have been easy for me to convince myself that we had stopped moving and were hanging perfectly still in space. But the indicator told me that we were travelling at 875 miles an hour, then 900, and finally, 1000 miles an hour.

As the needle touched the last mark on the dial and agitated itself as if it were trying to push away beyond, I felt an extraordinary sense of lightness. I can make this sensation clear only by saying that I felt suddenly younger. I asked Captain Mayo how he was feeling, and he replied: "I feel as if this is just a dream."

I did not look round at that time. F.S.2 is designed so that it may be dually controlled. I, sitting in front, kept my eyes ahead. But a second or two later my eyes filled with tears, as though I had been struck on the nose. Indeed, my nose at the same moment began to throb and ache.

It had throbbed and ached in a similar way shortly after the septum had been removed in the operation that followed the explosion in my laboratory in 1943.

The throbbing and the ache brought this very vividly back into my recollection. Two or three seconds later, instead of this throbbing, I was aware of a strange shocked numbness, which, even as I became aware of it, went away.

Something compelled me to loosen my mask for a moment and feel my face. First of all, I touched my nose. It was no longer broken. It occurred to me, naturally, that this was an illusion such as one may be occasionally subject to at certain heights and under certain pressures.

I spoke to Captain Mayo and asked whether he was all right. He said: "Well, I guess I am." His voice sounded uneasy, and I asked him if he was sure that he was all right.

Captain Mayo did not answer, and so I turned my head and saw him touching himself uneasily and looking at his hands in a bewildered way.

"Too much oxygen? Too little?" I asked.

Captain Mayo replied: "I just feel a bit strange."

I said: "We've touched a thousand miles an hour."

"How did we ever get to do that?" he asked, and his voice was different. All the authority was gone out of it. Then he uttered a sharp cry and said: "My arm! My arm!"

I looked and saw that his left forearm was dangling. It would have been hanging vertically downwards but for the support of the layers of sleeve that enclosed it.

Even as I looked, Captain Mayo's arm straightened out with a jerk, and at that his whole manner changed. He squared himself, and said: "This is it, Bill! Let them have it!"

And then I remembered that these were the words Captain Mayo is reported as having said when he was flying in France in 1942, and, his arm smashed by flak, took a Marauder into a suicidal dive from which he emerged alive and unhurt—except

for his shattered arm. I felt remarkably light and cheerful. In an indefinable way I felt different. I began to remember things which had faded out of my memory long before—things trivial in themselves, yet somehow important at that moment.

The needle of the indicator had gone limp; yet I am sure that we were moving at 1000 miles an hour at least. Only the vibration of F.S.2 indicated to me that we were moving. But the speed indicator being dead, I had a strange and unreasonable sense of having gone out of this world. Strange, illogical anxieties crept into my mind. I said to myself: *Tomorrow, at about eleven o'clock, I must see what has happened to Ledbetter's castings.* And I remembered then that Ledbetter was in Canada and that he had not made a casting for me since 1938, when my hair was still black. I was unable to resist the impulse to peel my glove away from my cuff.

There was a reason for this. In the summer of 1938, a week before Ledbetter had finished my castings, I was rather severely bitten in the right wrist by a schnauzer dog belonging to my sister. This bite had worried me then; I had feared infection and disablement at a certain operative moment.

There was no disablement and no infection. The marks of the dog's teeth have faded, so that now they are scarcely visible. But as I looked I saw four half-healed lacerations in the skin of my wrist grow angry and inflamed, and then, in a split second, change so that they became bleeding red wounds and then, in a flash, disappear. And I observed, also, that the hair on my wrist, which, since 1937 has been grey, was black.

I felt my nose. When I took off with Captain Mayo, it was smashed flat and boneless, as it is at present. Yet under my fingers then, it was hard and straight as it had been before it was broken. I uncovered my face and looked at my reflection in the glass-covered dial of one of the instruments in front, and I saw that my face was different. I have been clean-shaven since 1936, and grey-haired since 1938. The shiny glass reflected my face, strangely young. The nose was unbroken, and under it I saw a short black moustache.

I have not had a moustache since late in the autumn of 1936, when I shaved it clean at the request of a young lady whom I have since all but forgotten. As I looked at this incredible reflection of myself, I found myself wondering what this young lady was doing, and reproaching myself because, on her account, my mind was so easily taken away from the work upon which I had been so keenly concentrating. It was as if I had slipped back nine years in time. I did not like that.

And still we might have been motionless in the sky.

It is fortunate for Mayo and for me that I turned just then to say: "Tell me, how do I look?"

Captain Mayo was apparently unwell. He is, as the records show, about twenty-six years old, six feet tall, and one hundred and seventy-two pounds in weight. When I turned, just then, I saw him as a boy of about sixteen, ludicrously little, in a heap of heavy, complicated garments that were slipping away from him as he became smaller, line by line.

His mask had slipped. His eyes were closed and his mouth was open. He was saying: "Mother! Mother!"

I reached back to shake him. As I did so, one of his gloves slipped off, uncovering the hand of a little boy.

It is fortunate I turned when I did. Another fifteen minutes might have put an end to everything. I knew in those few seconds that what Berliner dreamed was basically true, concerning man in relation to time and velocity. Travelling at a certain speed, presumably in a given direction—I hesitate to specify or to say that it is necessary to specify direction—a man touches one of the grooves along which time travels.

Berliner maintains that time passes man, and not that man is swept along by time. In common with certain others, I used to laugh at this. Now I have modified my opinion.

In only a few minutes, at that speed, Captain Mayo and I were back ten years in time.

I am thankful that this occurred to me. If the principle of F.S.1 and F.S.2 had not been clear in my mind eleven years ago, we must have crashed. In a few minutes more I believe that we should have gone back to the period when F.S.2 was nothing but a theory. I believe that I should have found myself in that machine like a child in a nightmare, isolated at a great height. And then there would have been a sickening sensation of falling, falling! And behind me under those heavy clothes there would have been a baby crying.

Already there was a certain dreamy woolliness in my head. I was experiencing something I had experienced somewhere between sleeping and waking many years before. I knew exactly in what machine I was flying. But I no longer knew what made it what it was. It seemed to me that I was rushing back, faster and faster, towards the eleven-year-old deadline behind which I should be lost for ever. The memory of the Christmas of 1934 was very vivid in my mind.

We were travelling faster and faster. My only hope was in a quick turn. Then, it seemed that I was in F.S.1. Even that was fading. Nevertheless, I managed to turn. I saw my face

getting older.– I felt the impact that broke my nose, and then the familiar ache and throb that resulted. Looking behind me, I saw Captain Mayo stirring uneasily. He had filled out his clothes again. In a minute or two he became conscious. He told me that he had a black-out, as it is called, on the turn.

I maintain that Berliner touched a certain aspect of the truth. In maintaining this and committing these notes to writing, I may be discrediting myself, and inviting suspicion of my other conclusions. Nevertheless, the danger which I call Danger B deserves investigation.

Doctor Sant's F.S.2 I regarded as vastly important. Apart from that which makes it fly, there is an automatic air-compression device and a " forward brake "—as they call it. Work is going forward on F.S.3. Hahningen's lined peralumin will make practical Sant's early dream of the double nose. Fowler's indicator will be fool-proof, pressure-proof and altitude-proof. Weather permitting, F.S.3 should be tested in May.

That F.S.3 will almost certainly break every known record is unimportant, as I see it. The War Department believes in Doctor Sant. So do I. Doctor Sant believes in the improbable; so did Galileo, Marconi, Watt, Leonardo da Vinci and the Brothers Wright. And so do I.

It is pretty well established that Doctor Sant never committed himself without reason. I cannot understand what Berliner wrote any more than a journalist of the eighteenth century could understand what Newton wrote, but I have faith in Sant—like the War Department. The Sant Report may indicate that when it is safe to travel fast enough, we may have conquered death—that is to say, the ordinary physical and emotional wear and tear of life and time. It is indicated that if we move fast enough, we can catch up with past years.

I put this badly because it is necessary to convey the straight idea. Fine writing, imaginative writing—must come later.

I have the report of the Montana crash. Tex Oden took off alone in a certain jet-propelled plane which crashed in Montana. Out of the scorched and twisted wreckage the authorities picked certain remains of a human being. This human being must have been a child nine or ten years old, according to the analysis of the carbonized fat. It remains to be worked out.

★ ★ ★

Adolescence is a kind of emotional seasickness. Both are funny, but only in retrospect.

ARTHUR KOESTLER, *Arrow in the Blue*

RAINBOW

**He jumped—splendid, spinning,
blue and silver, brilliant in the sun**

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

IT was Hansi who told me about the giant rainbow trout—Hansi, ten years old, blond, sturdy, and pink-cheeked, who lived in the picture-postcard village in the Bavarian Alps where, for me, the war had ended, and for a little while I had become administratively becalmed. He had stalked me shyly from tree to tree for a couple of days, along the banks of the icy, crystal-clear river, discovered that I represented chocolate, and trout for him to take home to his mother, and we became fast friends.

There was a singular charm about Hansi. When he found out that I always brought him chocolate, he gave me gifts in return. For some reason he did not like accepting anything for nothing. Through him, I acquired a medium-sized dried frog, a rusty padlock with no key, a pre-war book of tram tickets for the city of Budapest, and many other important treasures.

"Take it," he would say to me, as he produced each new gift. "You have boys at home in England, *nicht*? They will like to have this."

He was right. The dried frog will almost certainly become an heirloom among the males of my family, for it travels everywhere we go, wrapped in cotton wool, in an old cigar-box. It has also become a family oracle, which we consult with incantations and peculiar ceremonial before taking important sporting decisions.

After we had fished together for about four days, one afternoon, as we were walking back to the village, Hansi said to me: "You know the big pool below the dam, Herr Major? In it, there is a fish—" he put his small arms as wide apart as they would go—the real fisherman's full stretch—"that big. He is a very clever fish. All the people here know about him. You will catch him, I think. Are you a professional fisherman in civil life, Herr Major? That is what I have told Mutti," he added.

I smiled, but made no answer. It was a pretty compliment.

"They call him *der alte* Fritz," Hansi continued. "He is the biggest fish in Germany—perhaps in the whole world. I've fished for him with worms for a year. I don't believe he eats

worms. But you will catch him surely, with your flies. I once saw him eat a fly. He went splash, and it was gone."

Next evening, we went together to the dam to look for the giant rainbow called Fritz.

The dam at Schellenbach is high and built of stone blocks. As you face it from below, there is a steep, sloping wall to the left, then there is the dam itself, with a spillway and a sluice to control the spates at the time of the melting of the snows. To the right, some distance above the dam, the water has been diverted into a channel to generate power for a sawmill, and pours down under a road bridge to rejoin the main stream below the dam, where the flood-water has hollowed out a deep, green, swirling pool. Even the outflow from the pool is over three feet deep, and forms a fierce, foaming V where the millstream current meets it. Together, the united waters pour on for fifteen yards until the river widens into a broad pool, of varying depth.

We approached the dam on the left bank of the river, by the side of the sloping, steep wall. Near the wall, about twenty yards from the dam, the flow of water had built up a shifting spit of sand. In between the spit and the wall there was a deep back-water where, if you hooked a good fish and had the luck to confine it to the top of the pool, it could be beached or netted. The current ran swiftly past the sandbank on its right-hand side. It was an excellent spot for a big fish to lie and collect the feed coming up from the depths of the pool.

We stood together and considered the situation for a moment in silence. "So, Hansi," I said at last. "Is that where *der alte* Fritz lives?"

Hansi looked up at me, chagrined. "Then you know," he said. "You have been here before?"

"No," I replied. "But it is by guessing correctly where the big fish lie that one often catches them. This is a good place for a big fish, so I would always approach it very quietly. I've never tried the dam from here before."

The sun came out from behind a bank of low cloud, and suddenly the whole river was clear, transparent, like swirling, twisting, molten glass. You could see every movement in it. All at once, I saw the fish. Silvery, stately, dark-backed, it glided smoothly upstream from a place two or three yards above us, and took up its station by the edge of the spit of sand. I judged that it was over five pounds in weight: a tremendous fish!

"There he goes!" said Hansi tensely, pointing with a trembling finger.

"We'll try him," I said.

As I oiled my fly, I watched the big fish move about, feeding,

but the sun was for a moment too brilliant, and I waited. On the bridge to the right of the dam, a line of small boys of about Hansi's age stood chattering, their heads and shoulders above the parapet. The sun went in, as though God had closed an eye; the pool became luminously sombre, and I played out my fly, flipping it lightly and accurately towards the fish.

Suddenly, just as I was about to make my cast, a volley of stones came from the bridge. They fell in a splashing pattern above and beyond the sandbank, into the pool, accompanied by a shrill chorus of voices from the bridge: "Pfui! Pfui! Hansi, pfui! Leave the fish alone! Our fish! Pfui, Hansi, pfui!"

Beside me, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Hansi blush scarlet. I looked up at the bridge sharply, then back to the river. The fish had gone, and I let the fly fall on the surface of the water, reeled in, and turned to him. "Well, Hansi," I said, "what does this mean?"

I knew already what it meant, but wondered exactly what Hansi would find to say in reply. After all, until very recently I had been, still was, in fact, an enemy.

"They don't like me to go out with you," he said angrily. "They say I do it for chocolate. In the school yard, they kick me. But I don't care. I want to learn how to fish like you. Of course, I like chocolate too, but it's not fair to spoil the fishing . . ."

"Perhaps they don't understand, Hansi," I said. "The war is over, but I am still a British officer. Let's go and talk to them, shall we?"

"They won't wait for us," he said. "You'll see. They'll run away. They think you'll be angry."

He was right. As soon as they saw us leave the river, the boys ran away, hooting and laughing. When we reached the bridge, a big, bearded, middle-aged man in a green coat and leather shorts was standing watching the river, pipe in mouth, but with no tobacco in it.

Hansi whispered: "The Herr Bürgermeister . . ."

I went and stood beside the man, but said nothing. He expected me to lodge a formal complaint, I suppose, perhaps even to storm at him as one of his own officers would probably have done in similar circumstances, so I remained silent for a full two minutes. Together, we gazed at the pool. I concentrated my eyes on the spit of sand we had just left.

Soon, I saw what I expected, and pointed at the river. "See, the fish is back in his place, Herr Bürgermeister," I said. "Did you see him rise just then?"

He nodded. "You have sharp eyes, Herr Major." He turned and looked at me. He was a man of about fifty, with a

wide brown face, good white teeth, and laughing, light blue eyes. It was obvious that he found it impossible to be formally unpleasant.

"Tobacco?" I asked, handing him my pouch.

He almost took it, then said: "No, thank you very much, Herr Major."

"Perhaps you are a bit like your Schellenbach schoolboys, Herr Bürgermeister," I said slyly, smiling at him.

"Perhaps." He turned to the river again before continuing: "You would do just the same in their place, Herr Major. You can't blame them, can you?"

"Of course not," I agreed. "And I don't. But Hansi here is very angry with them, aren't you, Hansi?"

Hansi looked embarrassed and said nothing, shifting about on his feet and looking at the ground. Then the Bürgermeister smiled. "Ach, Hansi is only doing what we must all do in six months' time anyway," he said. "So perhaps I shall have a fill of your tobacco, Herr Major, if you don't mind."

"Good." I passed it to him.

"That rainbow," he said as he filled his pipe, "we all know him round here. I hooked him once last year, but he broke me. It was an old cast. If you got him, you would soon be the boys' hero. Boys are like that. But they'll try and stop you all the same, because they say it's our fish—the village's fish. I can only scold them for their bad manners, you understand. Most of the men are still away with the army, and the boys are out of hand. I'll speak to them, of course. It is my duty. I shall also tell their mothers. Thank you for the tobacco, Herr Major. Good evening."

He raised his hat and left us, and we went back to the river again. Soon, a fair-haired, buxom woman in a coloured dress came to the bridge, and Hansi told me in a stage whisper that it was his mother.

She watched us for ten minutes, arms over the parapet of the bridge. Before she left, she called out to Hansi in a clear voice which rose easily above the sound of the river: "Hansi! Supper in an hour! And don't forget to thank the Herr Major for his kindness."

She waved to us, smiled, and walked away.

Hansi waved back, then looked up at me, pleased. "I think she likes you," he said, "because she lets me stay."

The Bürgermeister knew the boys of his village well. Hansi's playmates waged war on us whenever we fished the pool below the dam. They spied on us from among the pine trees as we

approached it. Occasionally, we saw a boy stand up at some vantage-point and watch us for a few minutes. They were defiant little figures, lanky or stumpy, with stolid, hostile faces. Nevertheless, when I met them face to face, I made ground with them. Hansi told me that they could not make out why I never scolded them, or mentioned the stone-throwing.

One evening, I confronted them all after Hansi and I had finished for the day. I had a good basket of trout, eleven or twelve, and we laid them out in a glittering, silvery line on the neat grass verge between the bridge and the road. The boys could not resist touching and admiring them. They would none of them speak to me, although they talked among themselves, eagerly and excitedly. I decided to try new tactics.

" Come, Hansi," I said. " I'll teach you how to throw a fly, so that one day you'll catch *der alte* Fritz, all by yourself."

I pushed him by the shoulder, ahead of me, then said, turning round and addressing the little group behind me on the bridge, " You may each take a fish for your supper. There are seven of you. The rest are Hansi's, to take home to his mother, except the big one, which he will deliver to the Herr Bürgermeister."

There was a little burst of chatter from the group of boys, then they put their heads together, and whispered. A moment later, the biggest boy stepped forward and spoke: " Thank you," he said.

It was their first unbending. They took their fish obediently and scattered to their homes.

For the next few days, the war continued. My small enemies still followed me about, and protected their fish by scaring it away with stones into the deep water, whenever we approached the pool. Nevertheless, they waited for me on the bridge, having discovered that I was harmless. Besides, food was short in Bavaria at that time, and I knew that the addition I was making to their family menus was not to be despised.

On about the third day, I packed up long before I reached the pool and walked round to the bridge by the footpath. The enemy was waiting for me as usual, but for the first time, no stones had been thrown into the pool. I continued in this way for two or three days, and once or twice, in the late evening, I was able to fish the pool, undisturbed, after they had gone to bed. The big rainbow was very wary, but I was able, none the less, to mark and observe his feeding habits.

At last, the day arrived when I had decided to bring my strategic plan into action. It had been a perfect fishing day, soft with the beginning of summer, cloudy, but with warm, sunny

intervals of half an hour and longer. Before fishing, I revealed my thoughts to Hansi.

" We shall come back to the bridge as usual with our fish, divide them, talk for a while, then pretend to go away in the jeep, down the road towards Salzburg. Then we'll hide the jeep among the trees about a quarter of a mile down, cross the river by the cattle bridge—you know the one—and creep up and have a try for the *alte* Fritz without them knowing."

Hansi's eyes sparkled. " And we shall get him, of course, Herr Major," he cried.

I shook my head.

" I doubt it," I said, but Hansi was adamant.

" The *alte* Fritz will eat your fly, and you will catch him," he declared.

Our plan worked perfectly. Fishing was easy in such weather and we had a wonderful catch—two fish each for the boys, and three for Hansi—and as we laid them out by the bridge for the company to take their pick, the Bürgermeister arrived.

" So, Herr Major," he said. " I am indebted to you for the fish. The whole village knows what the boys are doing, and they wonder that you put up with it. I would not, myself, in your position, but then you are an English sportsman, and perhaps think differently."

He looked at the boys sternly. " You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," he said.

The boys were not ashamed, but they were no longer sullen with me. They chose their fish, laughing, and all cried out a thank-you as they ran off towards their homes. I knew inwardly that they were already my friends. I motioned Hansi to get into my jeep.

" *Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Bürgermeister," I said as I climbed in beside Hansi. " We are going farther downstream for a change, and shan't be fishing here again this evening."

I winked at him as he waved us good-bye, and he winked back, pointing to the pool with one forefinger while he tapped the side of his nose with the other . . .

There was not a soul on the bridge when we returned to the pool some twenty minutes later. I walked quickly to within twenty yards of the spit of sand, and halted, waiting for the sun to go in for a moment, and put on a new cast, a point stouter than the one I had been using. I needed something to hold a heavy fish in the powerful current. Beside me, a tense, convinced Hansi bobbed up and down, holding my collapsible landing-net prematurely at the ready. When the moment came

to begin fishing, I glanced up at the bridge. The Bürgermeister was standing there, pipe in mouth, laughing.

There was a little wind behind me, and it stirred the grass at my feet as I played out my line and sat the fly on the water a yard or two ahead of me, to see how it looked. I was conscious now that three other men had joined the Bürgermeister on the bridge, and one woman—Hansi's mother.

Hansi suddenly grasped my arm. "See!" he said. "He is there. Right in at the bank!"

I nodded. Then the wind dropped. It was a perfect, still moment. There was a wonderful tension in me, in the air, in my audience, in the whole scene. I flicked out a perfectly straight cast, and the fly landed on the water a yard above my fish's head, but to the right. Playing the line quickly back into my hand, I watched my fly pass by him. For a second, he seemed to move sideways towards it, and I felt Hansi's hand touch me, but the fish did nothing.

"Careful, Hansi," I warned. "Get excited, and we shall lose him."

I lifted the fly from the surface, dried it in the air with a few powerful flips of the rod, then tried again. This time, I aimed the fly straight for the point of the spit of sand where the current was almost sluggish. It landed right in at the bank, about six inches from the sand, and floated bravely downstream.

It was just above my fish's head when he moved, hardly rippling the surface. A dimple, and the fly vanished, and in the same instant there was a tremendous splash and a boil of foam: I felt a great weight at the head of my rod, the reel screamed—and he was on!

A yell resounded from the bridge, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw that there were a dozen people watching—and with them the whole gang of my enemies, the boys!

My fish did not turn downstream. He ran hard towards the dam, taking up my slack line in an instant, and I ran with him until I stood at the spot I had picked in advance, right at the end of the spit of sand where he had lain. My great chance was to keep him near the top of the pool, and so far I had succeeded. He tore at top speed towards the dam, a few inches below the surface of the water. There was no checking him; he simply went straight on.

Just in time, I realized what he was going to do—the spectacular jump of the rainbow in trouble, straight into the rushing water flowing off the spillway! I checked him slowly, increasing the pressure as the rod in my hand bent into a terrific tight arc, the current thrumming against the taut cast.

Then he jumped—splendid, spinning, thrashing, flashing with blue and silver, brilliant in the sun, which now glittered on the water, dazzling me. I lowered the head of the rod a fraction as he splashed back mightily into the foaming water. A cry of sheer excitement rose from the bridge.

I had turned him! For a moment, I breathed more freely as he circled and I kept lateral pressure on him to prevent him attempting the fatal downstream run while he was still fresh, and there would be no holding him. At last, he came towards me, slowly; I backed away up the bank of the river, reeling in as I went, knowing that he was probably preparing for a run at my feet.

He came at me suddenly, at speed, but I had gained just enough line to keep it taut during the rush, then before I had time to recover myself, he was tearing line out again, dashing for the bridge, forty yards away, again almost on the surface of the water. He never checked until I could feel under my finger the dry lightness of the backing on my reel, but he was at the end of his run, and started to jump, methodically, regularly, whirling back and forth, under the very noses of the crowd on the bridge. Rod in one hand, I clambered onto the sloping sides of the dam, all the time keeping my eye on the fish.

Here was the hub of the battle. I had somehow to turn him and bring him back into the deep part of the pool, without letting him overrun me. It was then that the Bürgermeister shouted: "Be ready to move back to the river-bank quickly—I think we can turn him—with stones!"

I shouted my assent. Then from the bridge, my former enemies, the boys, began to throw stones at the fish as he jumped, at first with no result, then suddenly, another yell and I was running, slipping and scrambling, for the shore, reeling in for dear life. Somehow, I got in my line . . .

There followed five minutes of steady diving and underwater boring into the depths of the pool, but the fish was under control, and tiring fast. Occasionally I saw him, huge and thick and deep-bellied, shining and glittering in the sun, brilliant with rainbow colours, turning and twisting.

All this time, I had forgotten about Hansi, though I could sense him beside me, following every movement of the battle. The moment of truth was coming.

"Get ready, Hansi!" I cried excitedly. "I'll run him into the backwater. See, he is almost on his side. Put the net well under him, and lift gently. Don't rush it."

Shaking with excitement, the boy bent down, net in hand, watching the fish. He was rolling now, and as usual I was sorry

that the end was near—the anticlimax of victory. He made a last dash for liberty when he saw the net for the first time, but it was no use. Rod bent almost double, I worked him into the backwater. Hansi slipped the net under him and lifted.

The great silver, rainbow-stippled mass, thrashing and leaping, was safe on the bank. We shouted with triumph, and a cheer went up from the bridge.

Five minutes later, we weighed him—seven pounds and four ounces! Every man, woman, and boy present picked him up in turn by the gills and balanced him in their hands, uttering admiring cries.

At last, the Bürgermeister spoke to the boys: "Well, *Kinder*," he said. "What now? Does the Herr Major deserve our fish? You, Ernst, what do you say?" He addressed the eldest and largest of my enemies, with authority.

The boy looked me straight in the eyes and smiled. "Yes," he said, and nodded his head. "It was good to watch. But now the Herr Major will take it away, and . . ."

I went over to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Who said so, Ernst?" I asked, interrupting him. "You don't know. What if I gave it to you and Hansi, and asked Hansi's mother to cook it for all of you? What then?"

There was a murmur of approbation, even from among the grown-ups.

"Ach, Herr Major, that . . ." suddenly he was shy, addressing me as a friend for the first time, "that would be quite different . ."

We cut a stout sally stick and passed it through the great trout's gills, and between them he and Hansi carried it away, at the head of a triumphal procession.

I thought to myself: "Now at last, the war is over."

★ ★ ★

UNPOLISHED

I heard the other day of an elderly Dalesman who was said to be courting.

A woman I know met him and said, "Well, Mr. Adams, is it true that you're thinking of getting married?"

He looked doubtful, shook his head, then said, "Why, I did think aboot it. I' fact Ah had the woman i' mind as bein' likely. But"—he paused impressively—"Ah heard as she's nobbut a poor 'and wi' blackleadin'. Ah doot as Ah'll leave it."

NAOMI JACOB,
Me—Likes and Dislikes

GENTLEMAN'S RELISH

Such and so various are the tastes of men

MARK AKENSIDE, 1721-1770,
The Pleasures of the Imagination

The small room smelt vaguely of damp cloth, boot polish, whisky and American cigarettes; but pervading all else was the arrogant, animal smell of Tabora himself. There were two pairs of flashy socks drying over the fender, a packet of Lux on the mantelpiece, an elephant's foot in a corner, a stack of assorted whips, a top hat on a nail behind the door. The lion tamer was ironing his cloak on a card table covered with an army blanket. He had a patch of sticking plaster over one eyebrow and was obviously in a vile temper . . .

" Dames," he said, " should be obscene and not heard."

PAMELA BRANCH, *Lion in the Cellar*

Comprehensive Policy

I do love the young, the old,
Maiden modest, virgin bold,
Tiny beauties, and the tall;
Earth has room enough for all . . .

Paris was a pedant fool,
Meting beauty by the rule:
Pallas? Juno? Venus?—He
Should have chosen all the three.

I am wise, life's every bliss
Thankful tasting; and a kiss
Is a sweet thing, I declare,
From a dark maid or a fair!

JOHN STUART BLACKIE, *My Loves*

Good Plain Cook

On their way home Boris Andreyitch and Pyotr Vassilyitch were for a long time silent. Pyotr Vassilyitch even dropped asleep, lulled by the tinkling of the bell and the even motion of the sledge.

" Pyotr Vassilyitch," Boris Andreyitch said at last.

" Well," said Pyotr Vassilyitch, half asleep.

" Why is it you don't question me? "

"Question you about what?"

"Why, as you did the other times."

"About Verotchka, do you mean?"

"Yes!"

"But come now, really! She's quite a simple girl. She may be a good housekeeper, it's true, but that's not what you want, you know."

"Why not? Perhaps that's just what I'm looking for."

"What are you talking about, Boris Andreyitch! Upon my word! Why, she doesn't speak French at all!"

"What of it? Do you suppose one can't do without French?"

Pyotr Vassilyitch was silent for a space.

"I hadn't expected this at all . . . from you, that is . . . I believe you are joking."

"No, I'm not joking."

"God knows what to make of you then! Why, I thought she was only suited for a fellow like me. However, she really is a first-rate girl." And Pyotr Vassilyitch straightened his cap, thrust his head into the pillow and fell asleep.

IVAN TURGENEV, *The Two Friends*,
translated by Constance Garnett

One for the Ladies

A gentlewoman's twice as cheap,
As well as pleasanter to keep.

COVENTRY PATMORE

Knock-Out

She had known Sir Walter off and on for several years, but had finally become engaged to him at a croquet match at Denbury Manor in 1836. The circumstances leading up to the engagement were curious rather than romantic. Ann was partnering Sir Walter in the game, which he did not understand and which quite frankly bored him to distraction. One of their opponents, a flighty young woman, apparently with more muscle than sense, let fly with a mighty smite and the ball caught Sir Walter in his midriff, knocking the wind clean out of him. He lay on the ground and Ann, with great presence of mind, ran indoors and fetched a glass of brandy, which Sir Walter gulped down with relish. Sir Walter, who had always been very much taken up with Ann's looks, is said to have observed: "Beauty combined with usefulness, what more could a man want?" The courtship was settled as easily as that.

PETER CAREW, *Combat and Carnival*

Thin End of the Wedge

Ay, ay, gamesters, mock a plain plump soft wench of the suburbs, do, because she's juicy and wholesome; you must have your thin pinched ware, pent up in the compass of a dog-collar (or 'twill not do) that looks like a long laced conger, set upright, and a green feather, like fennel in the joll on't.

BEN JONSON, *Bartholomew Fayre*

Hot on the Track

In prime of lustie yeares, when Cupid caught me in,
And nature taught the way to love, how I might best begin:
To please my wandring eye, in beauties tickle trade,
To gaze on eche that passed by, a carelesse sporte I made.

With sweete entising bayte, I fisht for many a dame,
And warmed me by many a fire, yet felt I not the flame:
But when at last I spied, that face that please me most,
The coales were quicke, the woode was drie, and I began to toste.

GEORGE GASCOIGNE, *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*, 1573

Over-Enthusiasm

Legend has it that there was once a Scottish nobleman who married eight times, each wife younger than the preceding one. The first seven he disposed of by casting them into the sea from the top of a cliff. The eighth one pushed *him* over the same cliff.

This is doubtless an extreme case, but it shows what can happen if you carry the desire for novelty too far.

HELEN LAWRENSON, *Don't Trade in Your Old Wife*

Better Part of Valour

And therefore leauing each one to their lot,
To like, to loue, and liue as likes them best,
To keepe their choyce, or if it like them not,
When as they feele their spirits most opprest,
To vse their best discretion for their Rest,
I wish good husbands all to haue good wiues,
And all good louing wenches all good liues.

NICHOLAS BREETON, *Pasqvils Mistresse*, 1600

SHOPPING FOR MURDER

It's when the mercury crawls up to ninety-two that hatred comes to the boil

by RAY BRADBURY

THEY stood in the blazing sunlight for a long while, looking at the bright faces of their old-fashioned watches, while the shadows tilted beneath them, swaying, and the perspiration ran out under their porous summer hats. When they uncovered their heads to mop their lined and pinkened brows, their hair was white and soaked through, like something that had been out of the light for years. One of the men commented that his shoes felt like two loaves of baked bread, and then, sighing warmly, added, " Are you *positive* this is the right tenement? "

The second old man, Foxe by name, nodded, as if any quick motion might make him catch fire by friction alone. " I saw this woman every day for three days. She'll show up. If she's still alive, that is. Wait till you *see* her, Shaw. Lord, what a case! "

" Such an odd business," said Shaw. " If people knew, they'd think us peeping Toms, doddering old fools. I feel self-conscious, standing here."

Foxe leaned on his cane. " Let me do all the talking if—Hold on! There she is! " He lowered his voice. " Take a slow look as she comes out."

The front door of the tenement slammed viciously. A dumpy woman stood at the top of the thirteen porch steps, glancing this way and that with angry jerkings of her eyes. Jamming a plump hand in her purse she seized some crumpled dollar bills, plunged down the steps, and set off down the street in a charge. Behind her, several heads peered from apartment windows above, summoned by her crashing of the door.

" Come on," whispered Foxe. " Here we go to the butcher's."

The woman flung open the door of the butcher's shop, rushed in. The two old men had a glimpse of a mouth sticky with raw lipstick. Her eyebrows were like moustaches over her squinting, suspicious eyes. Abreast of the butcher's shop, they heard her voice already screaming inside.

" I want a good cut of meat. Let's see what you've got hidden to take home for yourself! "

The butcher stood silently in his bloody-finger-printed overall,

his hands empty. The two old men entered behind the woman and pretended to admire a pink loaf of fresh-ground beef.

" Them lamb chops look sickly! " cried the woman. " What's the price of brains? "

The butcher told her in a low dry voice.

" Well, weigh me a pound of liver! " said the woman. " Keep your thumbs off! "

The butcher weighed it out, slowly.

" Hurry up! " snapped the woman.

" Look," whispered Foxe. Shaw leaned back a trifle to peer below the display case.

In one of the butcher's bloody hands, empty before, a silvery meat-axe was now clenched tightly, relaxed, clenched tightly, relaxed. The butcher's eyes were blue and dangerously serene above the white porcelain counter while the woman yelled into those eyes and that pink, self-contained face.

" Now do you believe? " whispered Foxe. " She *really* needs our help."

The woman's braying continued at the grocer's and the dime store, with the two old men following at a respectful distance.

" Mrs. Death-Wish," said Mr. Foxe quietly. " Meat for the vultures, she is. Keep your eyes peeled for the obituaries."

" Obituaries? " said Shaw. " No. She'll make the front page of the dailies. Did you see the grocer wouldn't even turn round while he waited on her? "

" It's like watching a two-year-old run out on a battlefield. Any moment, you say, she'll hit a mine—bang! There's your story. Get the temperature just right, too much humidity, everyone itching, sweating, irritable. Along'll come this fine lady, whining, shrieking. And so good-bye. Well, Shaw, do we start work? "

" You mean just walk up to her? " Shaw was stunned by his own suggestion. " Oh, but we're not *really* going to do this, are we? I thought it was a sort of hobby. People, habits, customs. It's been fun. But actually getting mixed up in—? We've better things to do."

" Have we? " Foxe nodded down the street to where the woman ran out in front of cars, making them stop with a great squeal of brakes, horn-blowing, and cursing. " Are we or are we not Christians? Do we let her feed herself unconsciously to the lions? Or do we convert her? "

" Convert her to what? "

" To love, to serenity, to a longer life. Look at her. Doesn't want to live any more. Deliberately aggravates people. Asks for it. One day soon someone'll favour her, with a hammer, their

hands, or strychnine. She's been going down for the third time a long while now. When you're drowning you get nasty, grab at people, scream. Let's have lunch and lend a hand, eh? Otherwise our victim will run on until she finds her murderer."

Shaw stood with the sun driving him into the boiling white pavement, and it seemed for a moment the street tilted vertically, became a cliff down which the woman fell towards a blazing sky.

At last he shook his head. "You're right," he said. "I wouldn't want her on my conscience."

The sun burnt the paint from the tenement fronts, bleached the air raw, and turned the water in the gutters to vapour by mid-afternoon when the old men, numbed and evaporated, stood in the lower inner passage of a house that funnelled bakery air from front to back in a searing torrent. When they spoke, it was the submerged, muffled talk of men in steam rooms, preposterously tired and remote.

"Don't you even know her name by now?" protested Shaw.

"Easy does it." Foxe consulted the crudely lettered cards under the various room numbers in the entrance hall. "Probably some name like Beldame or Witcherley."

The front door opened. Foxe stopped a boy who carried a well-mangled loaf of bread.

"Son, we're looking for the woman who gives the door an *awful* slam when she goes out!"

"Oh, *her*!" The boy ran upstairs, calling back, "Mrs. Shrike."

Foxe grabbed Shaw's arm. "Lord, lord! It can't be true!"

"I want to go home," said Shaw.

"But there it is!" said Foxe, incredulous, tapping his cane on the name-plate. "Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Shrike, 331 upstairs. Husband's a longshoreman, big hulking brute, comes home dirty. Saw them out on Sunday, her jabbering, him so quiet, never speaking, never looking at her. Oh, come *on*, now, Shaw."

"It's no use," said Shaw. "There's nothing we can do. You can't help people like her unless they want to be helped. That's the first law of mental health. You know it, I know it. If you get in her way she'll trample you. Don't be a fool."

"But who's to speak for her—and people like her? Her husband? He hates her. Her friends? They hate her. The grocer, the butcher? They'd sing at her wake. Will *they* tell her she needs a psychiatrist? No. Does *she* know it? No. Who knows it? *I* do. *You* do. Well, then, you don't just keep vitál information like that from the victim, do you?"

Shaw took off his sopping hat and gazed bleakly into it. "Once

in a biology class, long ago, our teacher asked if we thought we could remove a frog's nervous system intact, with a scalpel. Impossible, of course. The nervous system's so much a part of the frog there's no way to pull it like a hand from a green glove. Well, that's Mrs. Shrike. It's very sad. But I think we've gone too far already."

"True, all true," said Foxe patiently, earnestly, nodding. "But all I want to do is post a warning. Drop a little seed in her subconscious. Tell her, you're a murderee, you're a victim looking for a place for it to happen. I must at least try once, I simply must!"

"It's too hot to talk."

"All the more reason to act. Honest truth, more murders are committed at ninety-two degrees Fahrenheit than any other temperature. Round one hundred, too hot to move. Under ninety, cool enough to survive. But right *at* ninety-two degrees, lord help everyone, is the nucleus of all irritability, sweat, overheatedness. Hatred comes to the boil. The least thing, a word, a look, a sound, a harp-thread broken, the drop of a hair and—irritable murder. Irritable murder, there's a petty and terrifying phrase for you. Look at the hall thermometer, Shaw—eighty-nine degrees. Crawling up towards ninety, itching up towards ninety-one, sweating towards ninety-two, one hour, two hours from now. Here's the first flight of stairs. We can rest on each landing. Up we go!"

The two old men moved in the third-floor darkness. "Don't look at the numbers," said Foxe. "Let's guess which apartment is hers."

Behind the last door a radio exploded, the ancient paint shuddered and flaked softly onto the worn carpet at their feet. The men looked at the quivering knob and heard the entire doorframe jitter with vibration in its grooves.

They looked at each other and nodded grimly.

Another sound cut like an axe through panelling. A woman, evidently on the telephone, shrieking to someone out of town.

The radio blasted out the rest of its song, the voice bellowed. Foxe rapped again and then dared to test the knob. To his horror, the door got free of his grasp and floated swiftly inward, leaving them like two old actors trapped on stage when a curtain rises too soon.

"Oh, no!" cried Shaw.

And then they were both buried in a flood of sound. It was like standing in the spillway of a dam and pulling the gate lever. Instinctively the old men clapped hands to ears, wincing as if the

sound was pure blazing sunlight itself that might burn out their eyes.

The woman stood at a wall phone. She showed all her large white teeth, chunking off her monologue, nostrils flared, a vein in her wet forehead ridged up, pumping, her free hand flexing and unflexing itself. Her eyes were tightly shut as she yelled, " Tell that damned son-in-law of mine I won't see him, he's a lazy good-for-nothing! "

Suddenly the woman snapped her eyes wide, some animal instinct having felt rather than heard or seen an intrusion. She yelled for a full minute longer, then slammed down the receiver and said, without taking a breath: " Well? "

The two men moved together for protection. Their lips moved.

" Speak up! " cried the woman.

" Would you mind," said Foxe, " turning the radio down? "

She caught the word " radio " by lip-reading. Still glaring at them, out of her sunburnt face, she slapped the radio without looking at it, as one slaps a child that cries all day every day and has become an unseen pattern in life. The radio subsided.

" I'm not buyin' anything! "

She ripped a dog-eared packet of cheap cigarettes, snapped one of the cigarettes into her smeared mouth, and lit it, greedily sucking in the smoke, jetting it through her thin nostrils until she was a feverish dragon confronting them in a fire-clouded room.

" I've got work to do. Make it snappy! "

They looked at the unwashed coffee-cup near the broken rocking-chair, the tilted, greasy, thumb-marked lamps, the smudged window-panes, the dishes piled in the sink under a steadily dripping tap, the cobwebs floating like dead skin in the ceiling corners, and over it all the thickened smell of life lived too long with the window closed.

They saw the wall thermometer. Temperature: ninety degrees Fahrenheit.

They gave each other a half-startled look.

" I'm Mr. Foxe, this is Mr. Shaw. We're retired insurance salesmen. We still sell occasionally, to supplement our retirement fund. Most of the time, however, we're taking it easy and—"

" You tryin' to sell me insurance! " She cocked her head at them through the cigarette-smoke.

" There's no money connected with this, no! "

" Keep talking," she said.

" I hardly know how to begin. May we sit down? " He looked about and decided there wasn't a thing in the room he would

trust himself to sit on. He saw she was about to bellow again, so went on swiftly: "We retired after forty years of seeing people from nursery to cemetery gate, you might say. In that time we've formulated certain opinions. Last year, sitting in the park, talking, we put two and two together. We realized that many people didn't have to die so young. With the correct investigation, a new type of customers' information service might be provided as a side-line by insurance companies . . ."

"I'm not ill," said the woman.

"Oh, but you are!" cried Mr. Foxe, and then put two fingers to his mouth in dismay.

"Don't tell *me* what I am!" she cried.

Foxe plunged headlong. "Let me make it clear. People die every day, psychologically speaking. Some part of them gets tired. And that small part tries to kill off the entire person. For example—" He looked about and seized on his first evidence with vast relief—"there! That light bulb in your bathroom, hung right over the tub on a frayed wire. Some day you'll slip, make a grab and pfft!"

Mrs. Alfred Shrike squinted at the light bulb in the bathroom. "So?"

"People," Mr. Foxe warmed to his subject, while Mr. Shaw fidgeted, his face now flushed, now dreadfully pale, edging towards the door, "people, like cars, need their brakes checked; their emotional brakes, do you see? Their lights, their batteries, their approaches and responses to life."

Mrs. Shrike snorted. "Your two minutes are up. I haven't learnt a damned thing."

Mr. Foxe blinked, first at her, then at the sun burning mercilessly through the dusty window-panes. Perspiration was running in the tired lines of his face. He chanced a look at the wall thermometer. "Ninety-*one*!" he said.

"What's *eatin'* you, pop?" asked Mrs. Shrike.

"I beg your pardon." He stared in fascination at the red-hot line of mercury firing up the small glass vent across the room. "Sometimes—sometimes we all take the wrong turning. Our choice of marriage partners. A wrong job. No money. Illness. Migraine headaches. Glandular deficiencies. Dozens of little prickly, irritable things. Before you know it, you're taking it out on everyone everywhere."

She was watching his mouth as if he were talking a foreign language; she scowled, she squinted, she tilted her head, her cigarette smouldering in one plump hand.

"We run about, screaming, making enemies." Foxe swallowed and glanced away from her. "We make people want to hit us,

knock us down, shoot us. It's all unconscious, though. You *see*?"

Lord, it's hot in here, he thought. One window open. Just one. Just one window open would help.

Mrs. Shrike's eyes were widening as if to let in everything he said.

"Some people are not only accident-prones, which means they want to punish themselves physically, for some crime, usually a petty immorality they think they've long forgotten, but their subconscious puts them in dangerous situations, makes them jay-walk, makes them . . ."

He hesitated, and the sweat dripped from his chin. "Makes them ignore frayed electric flexes over bathtubs . . . They're potential victims. It is marked on their faces, hidden like—like tattoos, you might say, on the inner rather than the outer skin. A murderer, passing one of these accident-prones, these wishers-for-death, would see the invisible markings, turn, and follow them, instinctively, to the nearest alley.

"With luck, a potential victim might not happen to cross the tracks of a potential murderer for fifty years. Then—one afternoon—fate! These people, these death-prones, touch all the wrong nerves in passing strangers; they inflame the murder in all our breasts."

Mrs. Shrike mashed her cigarette in a dirty saucer, very slowly.

Foxe shifted his cane from one trembling hand to the other. "So it was that a year ago we decided to try to find people who needed help. These are always the people who don't even know they need help, who'd never dream of going to a psychiatrist. At first, I said, we'll make trial runs. Shaw was always against it, save as a hobby, a harmless, quiet little thing between ourselves. I suppose you'd say I'm the fool.

"Well, we've just completed a year of trial runs. We watched two men, studied their environmental factors, their work, marriages, at a discreet distance. None of our business, you say? But each time, the man came to a bad end. One killed in a bar. Another pushed out of a window. A woman we studied was run down by a tram. Coincidence? What about that old man, accidentally poisoned? Didn't turn on the bathroom light one night. What was there in his mind that wouldn't let him turn the light on? What made him move in the dark and drink medicine in the dark and die in the hospital next day, protesting he wanted nothing but to live?

"Evidence, evidence, we have it, we have it. Two dozen cases. Coffins nailed to a good half of them in that little time. No more trial runs; it's time for action, preventive use of data.

Time to work *with* people, to make friends before the undertaker slips in the side door."

Mrs. Shrike stood as if he had struck her on the head, quite suddenly, with a large weight. Then just her blurred lips moved. "And you came *here*?"

"Well . . ."

"You've been watching *me*?"

"We only . . ."

"Following *me*?"

"In order to—"

"Get out!" she said.

"If you'll only listen—"

"Oh, I *said* this would happen," whispered Shaw, shutting his eyes.

"Dirty old men, get out!" she shouted.

"There's no money involved—"

"I'll throw you out, I'll throw you out!" she shrieked, clenching her fist, gritting her teeth. Her face coloured insanely. "Who are you, dirty old grandmas, coming here spying, you old cranks!" she yelled.

She seized the straw hat from Mr. Foxe's head; he cried out; she tore the lining from it, cursing, "Get out, get out, get out, *get out*!" She hurled it to the floor. She crunched one heel through the middle. She kicked it. "Get out, get out!"

"Oh, but you *need* us!" Foxe stared in dismay at the hat, as she swore at him in a language that turned corners, blazing, that flew in the air like great searing torches.

"Who do you think you are? God? Passing judgment on people, snooping, prying, you old dirty-minded grandmas! You, you . . ." She gave them further names, names that forced them towards the door in shock, recoiling.

"See here!" said Foxe, stiffening.

Shaw was out of the door, pleading with his partner to come along, it was over and done, it was as he expected, they were fools, they were everything she said they were.

"Old *maid*!" shouted the woman.

"I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue."

"Old maid, old maid!"

Somehow this was worse than all the really vile names. Foxe swayed, his mouth clapped shut, open, shut.

"Old woman!" she cried. "Woman, woman, *woman*!"

Foxe was in a blazing yellow jungle. The room was drowned in fire, the furniture seemed to shift and whirl about, the sunlight shot through the rammed-shut windows, firing the dust, which leapt up from the rug in angry sparks when a fly buzzed a

crazy spiral from nowhere; on the baked brown wallpaper the thermometer said ninety-two, and still the woman screamed like the wheels of a train scraping round a vast iron curve of track; finger-nails down a blackboard, and steel across marble: "Old maid! Old maid! Old maid!"

Foxe drew his arm back, cane clenched in fist, very high, and struck.

"No!" cried Shaw in the doorway.

But the woman had slipped and fallen aside, evading his blow. Foxe stood over her with a look of positive disbelief on his face. He looked at his arm and wrist and his hand and his fingers, each in turn, through a great, invisible, glaring-hot wall of crystal that enclosed him. He looked at the cane as if it was an easily seen and incredible exclamation-point come out of nowhere to the centre of the room.

His mouth stayed open, the dust fell in silent embers, dead. He felt the blood drop from his face as if a small door had banged wide into his stomach. "I . . ."

Her mouth still gushed out her sickness, with words and sounds that were not even faintly words. It had been in her a long time, a long, long time. Foxe looked upon her, himself in a state of shock. He had loosed the flood of a lifetime and he felt in danger of drowning here. He sensed someone pulling him by his coat. He saw the door-frame pass on either side. He heard the cane fall and rattle like a thin bone far from his hand, which seemed to have been stung by some terrible, unseen wasp.

And then he was out, walking mechanically, down through the burning tenement, among the scorched halls. Her voice crashed like a guillotine down the stair at them. "Get out! Get out! Get *out*!"

Fading like the wail of a person dropped down an open well.

At the bottom of the last flight, near the street door, Foxe turned himself loose from this other man here, and for a long moment leaned against the wall, his eyes wet, able to do nothing but moan. His hands moved in the air to find the lost cane, moved on his head, touched at his moist eyelids, amazed, and fluttered away. They sat on the bottom step for ten minutes in silence, drawing sanity into their lungs with every shuddering breath.

Finally Mr. Foxe looked over at Mr. Shaw, who had been staring at him in wonder and fright for the full ten minutes. "Did you see what I did? Oh, oh, that was close. Close. Close." He shook his head. "I'm a fool. That poor, poor woman. She was right."

"There's nothing to be done."

"I see that now. It had to fall on me."

"Here, wipe your face."

"Do you think she'll tell Mr. Shrike about us?"

"No, no."

"Do you think we could . . ."

"Talk to *him*?"

They considered this and shook their heads. They opened the front door to a gush of furnace heat and were almost knocked down by a huge man who strode between them.

"Look where you're going!" he cried.

They turned and watched the man move ponderously, in fiery darkness, one step at a time, up into the tenement house, a creature with the ribs of a mastodon and the head of an unshorn lion, with great beefy arms, irritably hairy, painfully sunburnt. The face they had seen briefly as it shouldered past was a sweating, raw, sun-blistered pork-face, salt droplets under the red eyes, and dripping from the chin; great smears of perspiration stained the man's armpits, colouring his singlet to the waist.

They shut the tenement door gently.

"That's him," said Mr. Foxe. "That's the husband."

They stood in the little shop opposite the tenement. It was five-thirty, the sun tilting down the sky, the shadows the colour of hot summer grapes under the few trees and in the alleys.

"What was it, hanging out of the husband's back pocket?"

"Longshoreman's hook. Steel. Sharp, heavy-looking."

"What's the temperature?" asked Mr. Foxe, a minute later, as if he were too tired to turn his head to look.

"The shop thermometer still reads ninety-two. Ninety-two, right on the nose."

Foxe sat on a packing-case, making the least motion to hold an orange-soda bottle in his fingers. "Cool off," he said. "Yes, I need an orange pop very much."

They sat there in the furnace, looking up at one special tenement window for a long time, waiting, waiting . . .

★ ★ ★

VISIONARIES

Jamie sits with chin in hand
Dreaming of a foreign land,
There the children tax their wits
Dreaming of where Jamie sits.

KENNETH HOPKINS

MISS COLUMBUS

Discovery filled her with a strange pleasure

by BARBARA DEMING

THE American girl was possessed by a curious pride, a curious expectancy. She sat on a stone outside the city gate of Assisi—that gate below the church of San Francesco, where the land falls abruptly away. The day was going. As it paled, the city on its mountain and the plain from which it rose—of one substance always, one clay—flushed more deeply still the one colour, a rosy chalk; and the light of evening, as though it were a dust thrown up by this land, hung in the air in glowing particles, and stained the air, too, this colour.

If I sit here long enough, the girl thought, if I sit here patiently on this stone, I too shall be absorbed by this hue—I shall enter, and become part of this scene.

Emily was obsessed with breaking and entering. Driven by this obsession, she had parted a week ago in Rome from Margaret, with whom she had been travelling, and had set off by herself. "To discover Italy," her friend had laughed. And, as a matter of fact, Emily intended just this.

She had felt on the brink of it all this week. She had been tantalized. It was such a very friendly country, it lay so open to the voyager. When she was lost, and asked her way, strangers would not be content to give her directions; they would seize her by the hand and lead her there. On buses, on trains, she had scarcely time to settle down in her place before she would find herself involved in some intense discourse. All the way it had been the same. She had never known such friendliness. And yet, those she encountered remained somehow unknown to her. When they parted from her—at stations, at street corners, shouting warm good-byes—they vanished for her utterly. Each time she was puzzled by it, and, their smiles receding, she was left only with a sense of their mystery. In short, she travelled in a country that was not hers. They vanished back into a life she had no knowledge of.

Yet she sat, patiently crouched on her stone, full of a stubborn expectancy. Setting out alone had gone to her head. Go alone, go unarmed, and cities will fall to you—she held this faith. Here she had been at odds, consistently, with Margaret. Go fully

armed, Margaret believed; read in advance the words of other travellers about the city you are going to enter. But Emily disliked even to consult a map beforehand. One must begin, she thought, by wandering at random; one must turn to the map only to clarify a route one has already stumbled along; or one would never *really* read the map, never *really* break and enter the city.

She even, it must be said, felt a little this way about the language of a country, and thought it somehow wrong to be letter-perfect on arrival. Come with a few phrases, she believed, the courtesies —thank you very much, excuse me, please, dove gabinetto ?— learn from *people*. In her pride, she took this for humility. She conceived of travel rather in the terms of the fairy tales she had read in her youth. The heroine sets out in rags, and empty-handed. She is pure of heart and courteous to all she meets—she is simpatica. One to whom she is courteous turns out at last to have magic powers to bestow—secrets of the place.

Not far from where she sat, three boys were shooting pebbles far out into the air from catapults and, with shrill cries, watching them fall towards the plain. But now they could no longer follow with their eyes the pebbles' course. They tucked their catapults in their belts and strolled off, arms linked.

Emily rose from her stone. She was hungry. She entered the city gate again and began to climb the Via Venti Settembre. As she climbed, those on the street turned to stare at her. Emily was not a beauty, she was not extraordinary in face or limb, but they stared at her because she herself stared about her in such a peculiar fashion—as though she did literally expect a door to open in a wall, a guide to signal to her, smiling.

The night was warm. She had climbed a little way when she found a wine-shop. Through its double doors, open to the street, a chill fragrance issued like a breath. So she entered. A new cask of wine had just been opened. Half a dozen townspeople were there before her, containers in hand. " Americana," someone nodded. " Buona sera."

" Buona sera," she replied and smiled about her intently; then, flustered, dropped her eyes. It puzzled her a little that they spotted her so immediately for an American—even before she spoke. Very nearly everything that she was wearing, as a matter of fact, she had purchased here in Italy. She rather thought she had quite changed her skin. Her sandals were from Rome, her belt, her bag—of their yellow leather. Her dress had been made for her by a Roman dressmaker—cut a little high-waisted, in the Italian fashion. The label " Made in Italy " was on everything

she wore. Yet, their glances informed her, *she* was labelled still: American.

The proprietor wiped a glass on his apron and filled it for her. It was a white wine, light, dry, and of a penetrating fragrance. She gulped it quickly down. As she left, several followed her with their eyes, laughing, saying softly: " Americana."

She climbed on. Above her head, a canary in one of the little cages hung out in the street in this town, gave a trill, shaking its feathers out for the night. Emily felt a sudden exhilaration. The beauty of the evening, the wine on an empty stomach, the fact of her lonely state combined to produce in her this luxury. The taste of the wine spread from her tongue through all her limbs.

A little cart blocked her way, swung sideways across the narrow street. A small man and a girl stood beside it. " Gelato, signorina? " the man asked.

" Ah no, thank you," she said.

The man cocked his head at her. It was a warm night, he said (in his own tongue). " Give me an ice for the lady."

The girl opened the lid of the cart and brought out a tiny cone. He took it from her. " It is delicious," he said, holding it between his fingers with a very delicate gesture. " It is truly delicious."

He held the ice out to Emily. She didn't want it. She wanted the taste of the wine on her tongue still, or she wanted supper. But in the fairy tales the milch cow the heroine meets on the road at the end of the day begs of her, " Milk me, dear, I am heavy." The apple tree begs of her, " Pluck my apples, dear, I am heavy." And it is the mark of the heroine that she alone—and none of her fine sisters—performs the courtesy that is asked of her.

The little man obviously wanted to turn home, and his cart was heavy. She bought the cone. It was cherry, and sticky-sweet. " It is delicious," she assured him.

It pleased him. Another? Oh, it had been delicious, but she thanked him, no. The girl, she noticed, was studying her with a sweet gravity. The look was head-on, yet devoid of boldness, almost docile. She had met this glance before in young girls here, and it tantalized her. Gentleness of this variety Emily found a mysterious quality. The girl was a blonde Italian—though the man was very dark—a handsome girl, in a faded cotton dress that was too small for her, hitched high up her slender body.

I could ask them where I should eat, thought Emily. They could tell me of some place that is not simply for tourists. " Scusa," she asked the man. Could he tell her of a restaurant

here not too dear and not for tourists? She got the words out in Italian slowly.

The man cocked his head again, and smiled at her, there in the dusk. He shrugged, and then he cocked his head once more. "Come home with me and my daughter," he said. "Come home to my family, and we will give you dinner and we will give you a bed for the night. Then you won't have to go to a restaurant and you won't have to go to a hotel. They are all expensive."

So there it was. The man was smiling at her, and his daughter was smiling at her, nodding. And there was her invitation. She began to stammer. "Thank you," she said. And she repeated, "Thank you. That pleases me much," she said. (She had mastered only the present tense.) She did have a hotel for the night, but to come to dinner, that pleased her much—at which she was out of breath, and her cheeks had turned a feverish pink.

She wouldn't need a hotel room, he said again. She would stay the night with them. They lived three kilometres outside Assisi. She would ride there on the handle-bar of his bicycle, and he would bring her back into town in the morning. Emily sobered. It was necessary to stay at her hotel, she said, and she added gravely that her bags were at the hotel. It was not convenient, perhaps, for her just to come to dinner—At the end of her statement a question-mark hovered. She looked very sad indeed. The pink had gone from her cheeks.

The man was peering at her. "No, no!" he broke in. "Come to dinner. After dinner I will bring you back into town."

Emily looked at the daughter, and the daughter nodded, her face shining. "Yes, come."

"Good," Emily said, her fever returning. "Good. I will come. It pleases me much."

The man turned the cart uphill, and his daughter took hold of it with him. They pushed it together up the steep incline, Emily walking alongside them, her hand on the cart, too. Halfway up the hill they eased it off the street into a small unlit storage room on the ground floor of a house. Inside, two bicycles glinted against the wall. The man opened the cart and leaned into it, then straightened up, and handed Emily another little ice.

"My name is Carlo," he said. "My daughter's name is Francesca."

"My name is Emily," she whispered, and swallowed the ice quickly, and thanked him, at which he leaned into the cart again and came out with another.

"Ah, it is enough," she cried.

But—"No, eat, without compliments," he told her, so she

swallowed that one, too, wondering how many more were to follow.

She did not have to swallow a fourth. They walked the two bicycles up the remainder of the hill. At its crest the city's eastern gate stood up above them. Beyond it the land grew dark. Francesca mounted her bicycle, smiled at Emily, and pedalled off. Carlo straddled his bicycle and she slipped onto the bar, side-saddle. Carlo gave her arm a tiny amorous pinch.

Emily hopped off. "Ah no," she cried. She was sober again. "It is not possible," she said to him.

He just stared at her: "What is it?"

She could think of none of the Italian words most appropriate. "Non è possibile," she repeated, mournfully.

Carlo patted the bar. "Come," he said.

"No," she said, and: "I am afraid," she added sternly.

"You are afraid?" he asked.

"*Yes*," said Emily.

"*Don't* be afraid," said Carlo.

She was silent. Beyond the arch of the gate, Francesca had stopped and was waiting for them, looking back over her shoulder. Emily peered at Carlo. The last street light was a little distance from them. But from the city's pale masonry was shed still a faint irradiance. Emily squinted at him in this scant light.

He was a small man. Emily was of average height, but he was smaller by a head than she, and of slight build. There was the look of a boy about him still and his face, too, though heavily lined—the lines those of exhaustion—was nevertheless boyish. He had a wavy, pleasant mouth. His eyes were large, glossy amber, and were regarding her with a direct and curious regard.

She hesitated. "Should I fear him?" she was asking herself. Out beyond the gate, visions flickered for her in the dark: "Entrate"—she stepped across a lintel. She peered at him. He did not look the bully. If it came to that, she gauged herself the stronger. Besides, she thought, there is Francesca.

"It pleases me much to come to dinner," she said. "But this other—" She shook her head. Abruptly she stuck out her hand at him. "Is it a promise?" she asked.

"A promise," said Carlo promptly. He pumped her hand. "Come."

She mounted the bar again, and they lurched through the gate.

Emily had seen men, women, and children here—the skinny and the fat, the hale and the crippled—ride on the bar as she was doing, and had marvelled how some of them sat there, but now she marvelled more. It was a startlingly uncomfortable seat. This road was no worse than others—a dirt road, bending some-

times uphill, sometimes downhill, past vineyards, past olive groves, cloudily glimpsed—but she rode with clenched teeth. And now Emily felt captive. Now she felt reckless. She seemed to hear Margaret's voice explode in her ear: "Emily! *Where* do you think you are going?"

With a downward rush the bicycle turned off onto a rougher road, and jolted past a huddle of small buildings, and stopped.

Carlo took her arm, for she was staggering a little. Francesca led the way, and Emily followed, stumbling and climbing up steps. Francesca held the door open for her: "Entrate."

Inside, in a lighted room, people turned towards her in frank amazement, and stood stock-still and staring, like deer surprised in a field—a young woman, an old granny, a small girl. "An American," Francesca whispered to them, as if it were an enchanted word.

"My mother," said Carlo. "My wife. My younger daughter, Lucia. The signorina is called Emily," he told his family.

Emily shook all their hands. "Thank you," she said to each of them, other words eluding her.

Lucia put her hands behind her back, as though they were now strange to her. "Be comfortable, be comfortable," said the young wife. The granny pushed a straight-backed chair into the middle of the room, and Emily sat down.

It was a small oblong room. The walls were roughly plastered, and the floor was brick, scrubbed pale. There was one little window, set high and diagonally; near the door, was a low fireplace. The only furnishings were a crude table, several straight-backed chairs and a stool, a corner stand, on which were a basin and a pitcher, and another high work-table on which stood preparations for a meal.

A door into another room, which was dark, stood open. The bedroom, she supposed. And had she said she could stay the night, would they have slept all in the one room?

From the dark came a low cooing. Francesca slipped through the door and reappeared with a fat baby in her arms. "My son Beniamino," said Carlo.

His son Beniamino stared at Emily, unbelieving, and began to roar. The old woman giggled. "You are his first American," she said.

She felt quite like the first American upon that continent. As she sat there, in the centre of the room where the old lady had placed her, her pride returned to her, and she began to glance about her with the eyes of one who has entered where no other has ever entered. She felt recklessness rewarded.

They had no running water, she noted, and they must do their

cooking over the open fire. These discoveries filled her with a strange pleasure. A shelf for pots and pans ran along one wall. The shelf was decorated with newspaper, its overhanging edges scissor-cut into an intricate diamond pattern. She noted this with the pride of the first ever to have noted its like.

Every gesture, every small rite performed in this room fed her pride. Carlo turned his ragged pockets inside out upon the table-top. And his wife counted the heaped, curled lire. The old woman crouched down on the hearth, took pine cones from a large basket, and made a fire. Inhaling the aromatic fumes that flared in the room, Emily inhaled with them the sense that now she penetrated all mysteries. The old lady, still on her knees on the hearth, turned and questioned Carlo.

" No, she must return to her hotel," he answered.

The old lady, crossing the room, lifted dinner in her old hands out of the baking-dish in which it sat, ready for the fire, and put it in a long-handled skillet.

" Then I shall fry it," she said. " The other takes too long." She held out the skillet to Emily.

" Coniglio," said Carlo. " One of our rabbits."

The small creature lay curled upon itself in the pan, among herbs. " You understand what it is, coniglio? " Emily nodded, as gravely as though it had been an Englishman they were to dine upon.

The old lady hunched over the fire, her skinny old arm extended, holding out the skillet. The sweetish smell of rabbit pervaded the room.

Carlo pulled up a chair. Francesca did the same. Carlo's wife hung another pot on a hook over the fire, and then, her hands coiled in her apron, leaned against the table, smiling. Lucia walked the baby, but her eyes did not leave Emily. Lucia was small and dark, like her father, and her glance was more impudent than her sister's, and more cunning. She looked Emily up and down in detail. The grandmother, at the hearth, managed so to twist herself that she, too, was part of the circle round the girl.

A catechism began. Emily had learnt by now to anticipate this recital. She could have spoken both the answers and the questions, very nearly word for word. " Does it please you, Italy? " asked the wife. She had the gentle look of Francesca—a tired Francesca.

" Oh, much, much," answered Emily. " It is beautiful," she said. " And friendly."

As she had not many words to speak with, she tried to give each the stress of a flight of words, and this effort involved her in strange grimacing. " Oh, much," she repeated, and they stared

back and forth at one another, she and they—until Francesca spoke, in a voice scarcely audible.

" Sola? " she asked. " You are alone, no? "

" Yes," Emily said, " for a week, for a week's trip. Rome to Perugia to Florence to Assisi to Rome."

" Your mama, your papa are in Rome? " asked the old woman.

" No," she said. " Friends."

They asked in alarm, " You have no papa and no mama? They are dead? "

" No," she told them. " They are in America." " America," they breathed. And it sounded very far away indeed as they pronounced it.

" She is alone! " exclaimed Lucia.

" My parents and also their parents are alive," Emily volunteered. " My father's mother is eighty," she said, smiling at the old woman, " and more lively than I am."

" Eighty," said the old woman. " Eighty! I am fifty-five."

Emily had thought her perhaps older than eighty—a withered branch of a woman, half her teeth gone. She hadn't thought she had heard Carlo right when he had called her his mother.

" And how old are you? " they asked her.

" Twenty-three," she said.

" Twenty-three! " they marvelled. " Alone! "

" I am nine," announced Lucia.

" And Francesca? "

" Twelve," whispered Francesca. Emily had thought her at least fifteen. They stared back and forth at one another.

Had she seen their churches, they asked, and had she seen the frescoes of Giotto? She replied that she had, and that they were very, very beautiful. Then Carlo's wife asked, " Cattolica? " This question was not a question, really, but an assumption. Her acquaintance made, she was found to be simpatica. The voices that asked this question fell always into the same little tune, which said, " We find you human. So you are a Catholic."

" No," she answered, " I am Episcopalian."

They stared.

" It is another church," she said.

They opened their eyes wide.

" It is different but similar," she said, lamely.

They looked at each other. The old lady pulled the skillet off the flame and set it on the hearth and squinted at Emily, her head on one shoulder—a hunched-up woman in a black smock that fitted her like bark, and on her feet tattered slippers, but at her ears two delicate twists of gold, a grace-note. " You believe in God? " she asked, cautiously.

" Oh yes," said Emily, she believed in God.

" Ah, good," said the grandmother. " Dinner is ready." They remained, at the end of this exchange, of course, quite as baffled by each other, as thoroughly strangers, as they had begun. Emily had always found it so. But the fact was obscured for her in this instance, for she was about to sit down at table with them.

The table was small and they had to huddle close together—Carlo at the head, Emily on his right, Francesca next to her, then the grandmother, and then Carlo's wife. A place was set for Lucia next to her mother but she didn't sit down.

" She doesn't eat," said Carlo. " If she eats lunch, she doesn't eat dinner. If she eats dinner, she doesn't eat lunch. If she eats soup, she doesn't eat meat. If she eats meat, she doesn't eat soup."

He cast Lucia an admiring glance, and his wife cast her a despairing one. For the girl was skinnier than the grandmother. Her dress was too big for her; she had lost the belt to it, and it hung on her like a pillow-case. She wandered off into the next room to put the baby to bed, reappeared and crouched on the hearth to poke at the expiring fire, then went and, tiptoe, peered out of the high window—or pretended to peer, for out of the corner of her eye, always, she regarded Emily—and finally she came and stood next to her father at the table and frankly stared. The grandmother clucked at her, but she paid her no attention.

The first course was a thick bean soup. Emily was very hungry and the soup was very good, and she was glad when Carlo disdained his spoon and picked up the cup in his hands and drank from it. She did the same.

Next, Carlo carved the rabbit. Emily, in alarm, watched him transfer half the animal to her plate. " Ah no," she protested. " It is too much. No."

" You don't like rabbit! " He stared at her in distress.

Oh yes, she said, she liked it very much.

" Ah good, then," he said. " Good."

But she gestured at the other plates, none of them heaped so high, and said, " You give me too much."

" Ah, you don't really like rabbit! " he cried, and they all exclaimed unhappily.

Oh, she liked it very, very, very much, Emily said—and, to convince them, ate. Francesca filled her glass with wine, and " Drink, drink," Carlo told her, so she drank. And Francesca filled the glass again, saying, " Drink! Please! " And Carlo piled onto her plate what was left of the rabbit.

" No, no," she cried, but " Ah—it isn't good, then? " they all

cried in unison and she protested that it was very, very good (as it was), and added gestures to her words, and sounded " mmmm," and rolled her eyes to the ceiling, and—to convince them truly—ate.

When she had cleaned her plate, Carlo wiped his mouth and grinned and pushed back his chair. And Emily spread her hands wide and said to each one of them, helplessly: " Thank you."

The rabbit and the wine, the summer night, the fire's incense, and simply the fact of her entry into this house had left Emily a little giddy.

Now Carlo rose and vanished into the other room. He returned with a large alarm-clock ticking in his hand. He set it on the table, and faced it towards Emily. The hands pointed to five to ten. " It is time to take you home," he said. " You can take Francesca's bicycle. She can get a ride in the morning." And Francesca nodded eagerly.

So Emily stood up and tried again to say thank-you, to say her good-byes. She stuck out her hand to each one of them, and opened her mouth, hoping for more words than " Thank you very much," but none would come. So she repeated, " Grazie, *grazie—molto, molto*," grimacing, gesturing, to give the words stress.

Carlo was holding the door open, and she stepped out, looking back, still gesturing, still hoping for a little rush of eloquence. The terrace outside seemed to be unevenly paved, because her feet couldn't find the level; she kept shifting them, there in the dark, trying to stand up straight—thinking, Am I tipsy?

She had forgotten that she had approached the house by a flight of stone steps, and she suddenly sprawled out violently along the ground. The family went running down the steps after her, with cries of alarm. She scrambled to her feet. She called, " It is nothing, nothing! " Her wind was knocked out of her, and her right arm stung her sharply, but she could stand, and nothing appeared to be broken. The cries subsided.

" Come, then," Carlo said. Francesca held the bicycle for Emily to mount. Her eyes had adjusted to the darkness and she checked with herself again and she knew that she wasn't seriously hurt. But as she sat there astride the bicycle, finding her balance on it, she felt suddenly altogether helpless, and fallen from joy. She asked herself what was she doing there in the night, sitting astride a bicycle, among these alarmed strangers. She had the queer sensation of awakening abruptly, far from home, as one awakens sometimes in dreams, set down somewhere one has never been before, absurdly and without transition.

She hadn't ridden a bicycle since she was sixteen. She wasn't

sure that she still could. But "Come," said Carlo, and she called good-bye again and followed him.

Emily's bicycle wobbled from one side of the road to the other for a while. Then she straightened it out. At the main road, Carlo let her pass him. Then he wheeled up alongside her and reached over and gave her cheek a tiny pinch.

So there she was, this enthusiastic traveller. "So here I am," she said to herself listlessly. "Here I am." She shook her head and said, "No!" emphatically. And he dropped back, then wheeled up alongside her again and, squinting at her mischievously, made kissing sounds upon the air.

The moment that she had felt bold to cope with had come round to her, but meanwhile she had lost belief in the entire venture. Even as it was happening, this moment seemed remote—and the means to cope with it more remote still.

He whispered, "Stop a minute, Emily. Here, stop a little."

She said, "No, no, no!" And she decided, I shall simply keep pedalling, and hope that I have breath enough. "Non è buono," she scolded. "It's not good." And concentrating upon pedalling, she managed to pull ahead of him a little.

"Emily, stop," he called. "Emily, stop a little!"

So she stood up—remembering that this was how to put on speed—and, bent over, pumping hard, managed the top of the first hill.

She really had expected him to overtake her easily, for he made this trip every day, after all. But her legs were longer than his, she told herself hopefully. The stretch was downhill now for a way, and she used it to catch her breath, for she must be careful not to wind herself. The next hill was easier for her, and then there was a long gentle down-grade. She sprinted here and, looking back over her shoulder, she was surprised to find that she had left him far behind.

She heard him crying after her. His voice reached her in a sudden shrill gust from over the crest of the hill she had just descended, and she slowed down, because there was no invitation in the call now but only alarm. She wondered, What can be the matter with him? And suddenly she realized. He thinks I am stealing the bicycle!

The road passed some houses here, and a little group of people was on the road, taking an evening turn, and so she felt safe to stop. He came pedalling frantically down the slope, crying out, "Where are you going? Where are you going?" and pulled up, breathing hard, sitting astride his bicycle, gasping, and staring at her. She stared back. They were both aghast.

"Where are you going with the bicycle?" he cried. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to my hotel," she said.

"And why are you going so fast?" he cried.

She dismounted, and he dismounted, and each, awkwardly holding a bicycle, leaned over and poked forward in the half-light, to scan the other's face.

Carlo threw out his free hand. "I brought you home with me. I brought you home to my family. We made you welcome. We fed you. And now you run away with my daughter's bicycle," he cried. "Now you run away with my daughter's bicycle."

"No—Senti," she said. "Listen, please!" She was flushing at his words, but at the same time she wanted to relax into laughter. It was a grotesque turn of events. "Believe," she said, finding that word. "Believe."

He cocked his head. She turned to the bicycle and gestured as if to spurn it. "No, no," she said. Then she flushed again. "*Yes*," she said, "you were good to me. You were very, very good to me. All the family. Thank you," she said. "Thank you, thank you." She tried to make repetition take the place of decoration. "*But*"—she put everything into that word, "*ma*," throwing out *her* free hand, then raising her eyebrows at him—"this *other* thing." She shook her head at him. "Cattiva—bad." She remembered this word. He stared at her. "I was afraid," she said. She repeated, "Paura—fear."

The walkers were alongside them now, and hushed their voices and turned about to look at them, in passing.

"Sono ignorante," Carlo said. "I am an ignorant man. If it had pleased you, it would have pleased me. But I am not a man of violence."

Then Emily did truly, for a moment, have nothing to say, because she was ashamed. Go unarmed, and cities will fall to you—she had boasted this faith. But now, for the moment, the fact was uncovered to her that she merely travelled blind.

She said, "I believe it." She repeated: "I believe it now. Scusa—forgive me." She said, "Listen"—speaking painstakingly—"una ragazza ha sempre paura. Necessità. A girl always has fear. It is necessary." She asked him: "Capisce? Do you understand?"

He smiled in astonishment, and she said, "Excuse me. Do you understand?"

Again she stuck out her hand to him. He looked at it and grabbed it and shook it. Abruptly, they both laughed. "Allora," he said, and they mounted their bicycles again and, side by side, rode the rest of the way to the town.

At the gate of the city Carlo said, "Would you have a drink with me, to say good-bye?"

Emily accepted. He put Francesca's bicycle in the storage room, and then they went to a bar down the street. He had a glass of beer, and she had a glass of mineral water, for she felt she had had enough of intoxicants for that night. He became distressed at the sight of her arm, which was a little bloodstained from the fall, so at his request the bar-tender poured some gin along it, against infection.

They touched glasses, Carlo downed his beer, and she thanked him again, and thanked his whole family. She asked him to write his name and address in her notebook, which he did with a little difficulty, and they peered at each other once more, still looking surprised, each at the other. And they said good night. Outside, he turned uphill and she turned downhill towards her hotel.

The streets were empty and her feet made a lot of noise on the cobble-stones. The canary that had sung for her earlier awoke as she passed, and he hopped across his cage once, but sounded no note. A white cat with one broken ear walked with her the second half of the way home. She got her key from the drowsing boy at the hotel desk, and climbed the stairs to her room.

The water had been turned off, or had failed. So she crawled into bed without bathing, the dust of her fall still on her. Her right arm was stiff, and one finger was quite painful. Her body felt as though it were someone else's body, not her own, and she was again dispirited, as she had been after her fall down the steps.

A group of young men passed below her window, and stopped to have an argument. Their voices rose clear in the summer air, but though they were not talking very fast, not a single word they spoke sounded familiar to her. She had had it happen before when she was tired out: the language suddenly would go over her head like a great wave, and though she had been making some progress in it, it would be only gibberish to her.

And she felt again, what am I doing here in this country not my own? Her pride was quite gone out of her breast. She lay this way a long while before she dropped off to sleep.

However, in the morning she felt very differently. On the bus that took her down the hill to the railway station, she recognized an English girl who had arrived on the same train with her the day before. They smiled at each other, and the English girl crossed and sat down next to her. The English girl had spent the night, she told her, at the house kept by nuns up on the hill. The sisters had been terribly sweet to her, she said, in spite of

the fact that she herself was not a Catholic. " Rather not. I'm a bit of an atheist, as a matter of fact." And where had Emily gone?

So Emily recounted her adventure, with some abridgments, but telling of the rough ride there through the darkness on the stranger's bicycle, of the rabbit cooked by the old woman over the fire built of pine cones. " And leaving, of course, I fell downstairs and busted my finger, I think." She held it out. It was badly swollen.

" My word! " said the girl. " And they asked you into their home. My word! " Together they stared at the bruised finger, as though they had a marvel there, some magic properties gained from that evening, and they both turned now to gaze back up at the ancient city upon its ancient hill.

" Well *you* really *stormed* the town," said the English girl.

And Emily thought to herself that she had, rather.

★ ★ ★

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

" A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table," said Dr. Johnson, " than when his wife talks Greek." Our diners too hold forthright views. Allow one point for recognizing the gourmet in each case, and one each for the author and source, making a possible total of twenty four points. The answers are on page 95.

1 *" Old Mother Jameson's Farm House Dinner," said the label on the ornate tin. " I must remember* never *to go to dinner at Mrs. Jameson's," said Morell.*

2. *And the soup he took was Elephant Soup and the fish he took was Whale . . .*

3. *Nothing but crusts in the kitchen and pangs of hunger to assuage, having snipped off his buttonses, she curried the page!*

4. *Fiery-red his complexion, blotchy and be-pimpled—and his unwise diet? Garlick, onions and eek leeks . . .*

5. *The murphies were no doubt stunning, but there* was *a further luxury money could buy. The magnificence of a pound of Porter's sausages was reserved for the happy few!*

6. *An honest fellow enough, and one that loves quails . . .*

7. *The most adaptable of guests will tire of a diet of apple-peelings and paste in time, and the moment arrives when a crumb of bread will seem like ambrosia.*

8. *" This was a good dinner enough, to be sure," remarked the candid guest, " but it was not a dinner to* ask *a man to."*

DAI AND THE LIONS

From here to Holyhead there is no man can talk such a load of beautiful rubbish

by ROBERT BORGER

WE all like Dai Evans. Dai Evans with the red hair and the cracked voice, that came down from the north two years ago. We like Dai because there is nothing in this world that can get him down, not famine, nor pestilence, nor even Wales getting beaten at Arms Park. Not, of course, that there is much to worry about from that quarter. But if that tragedy did happen, Dai would still be wearing that grin that's wiped across his face as if he'd done it with his sleeve.

He is a man who asks no questions of life, and asking no questions, he doesn't have to stay for an answer. Oh, there's no denying it, he's a great boy, is Dai. I have never seen anybody that can drink so much beer and still look as sober as a chapel-deacon's mother. Or who can laugh so loud or long at anybody else's jokes. And I tell you, there is no man between here and Holyhead that can talk such a load of beautiful rubbish day after day without repeating himself or getting carried off to the nut-house, as can Dai Evans.

Take Saturday night now, when the boys are all down in the pub on High Street Corner. Used to be the Black Bull once, but when Dai started coming, Jenkins Top-shop called it the Cock and Bull and it's been that ever since. As I come in, there is Dai now, waving a great frothing pint, twitching his nose as if the flamer is full of feathers. And perhaps it is, you never can tell with Dai.

There he is, with the beer going in and the words coming out. Nobody knows what he's talking about, probably not even Dai himself. Stuff's just dumped in his head, he says, and out it comes. Nothing to do with him. But the boys are laughing their heads off, spilling more beer than they're drinking. I'm starting too, but for the love of heaven I couldn't tell you why. Might be that nose, of course. Dai's father grows potatoes up north and they say that's got something to do with it. Seems to have a life of its own without giving a damn for anybody.

Might be anything. But whatever it is, Dew, mun, it's the funniest thing you're ever likely to see, well, in this life anyway.

And then after a time something starts going wrong. Not that you could say it is now, or then, or last Friday. Perhaps it is that he's not feeling so well. Maybe just that you can't be as funny as that without having to pay for it sooner or later. It's as if a thin mist has fallen over Dai, as though he's not quite sure where he is or what's going to happen next. Sometimes he's just the same as always, and you think it was just bellyache or something. And you've no sooner made up your mind that's what it was, than he looks at you in a queer way, like it was through a glass darkly. As though he's never seen you before, or can't quite make out whether it's you or somebody else.

Of course, I don't like to say anything, and anyway, there's nothing you could put your finger on—everybody still laughs and the nose still twitches—but then, that nose will twitch alone and undismayed when Dai has left here and gone to the Land of our Father. And yet I know there's something going on, and I know that the other boys have noticed it, too. Everybody has a queer feeling that something is happening to Dai, and nobody likes to say anything because nobody knows quite what to say.

Well, there's nothing for a long time. It's winter, and there's moist yellow fog everywhere. One Sunday the rain is coming down in a fine drizzle, or perhaps it's just that the air's wet. Something about it that always makes me think of " has been, is now, and evermore shall be, Amen." South Wales on a Sunday, ay. With the heavens open and the pubs shut. I decide to go over to Dai's place for a cup of tea. Got a good landlady, Dai has.

When I arrive Mrs. Rhys is in the hall, looking worried.

" Glad you've come," she says. " That boy's going queer. Looked at me this morning as if I was a ghost. And lord knows, I'm solid enough."

Well, nobody is going to argue about that. But there's certainly something wrong with Dai. Sitting there by the fire, a bit like a child that's been woken up in the middle of the night and brought down to see Auntie Gwyneth from Treforest. For a while we just sit and watch the flames. Then Dai turns to me.

" You're Glyn Davies," he says, but he doesn't sound too sure.

" I'm Glyn Davies," I say, "as was my father before me, and his father—" but Dai interrupts me: " I suppose, too, that you would say that I was Dai Evans, and that this house has belonged to Mrs. Rhys for the last twenty years. You would say that this was a chair, and that thing over there a coal-bucket—not a mouse-trap or a harp, but a coal-bucket."

" You seem to know me very well," I say.

" And you think that it's a coal-bucket in its own right, and that when I'm dead, or asleep, it will still be there."

" Well, you don't think it nips down the road when your back's turned, do you? "

" No," says Dai slowly and grips my arm, looking at his hand at the same time as if to make sure it's really holding something, "not just down that road, but away, out of the world. Glyn," he says, " when I go to sleep upstairs, that coal-bucket vanishes into thin air, and so do you and even Mrs. Rhys."

He settles back into his chair and I rub myself. Whatever doubts Dai may have about the existence of my arm, I've never been so sure of it before.

" I've always dreamt a lot," Dai goes on, " ever since I was a kid. Well, nothing unusual in that. But round about a month ago, these dreams—we'll call them that for now because that's what you'll say they are—began to make sense, hang together. They'd start one night where they left off the night before, if you see what I mean. I'd fall asleep upstairs in my bed, an' my dreams would start by me wakin' up in another place, with another name, gettin' up an' goin' to work.

" Sounds a bit soft, I know, but I work as a lion-tamer, and my name is Freddy Dingle. Every flamin' night, imagine it, mun. Only, of course, over there it's daytime. People I meet, well, nothin' unusual about them, they talk about football an' dogs an' women, they eat an' they drink beer like you or me—only I can tell you, they've got beer there that's a damn sight better than the stuff they give you at the Bull. Well, now, there it is. They get up in the mornin' an' they go to bed at night, an' so do I, an' no sooner do I fall asleep—in the other place now, I mean—than I start dreamin' an' wake up here. Then Mrs. Rhys calls me, I get up, an'—well, you know the rest.

" Now one day, when I'm Freddy Dingle an' I'm havin' my supper in the canteen, I hear another man sayin' somethin' about a dream he had—just as I am talkin' about a dream now. That starts me thinkin' like, an' after a time, why, man alive, I can't tell any more when I'm awake or when I'm asleep, I don't know whether I'm dreamin' you or the lions. It's no good your tellin' me that you're Glyn Davies by day *an'* by night, an' that it doesn't matter a hang what's goin' on in my head, because the people in the other place say that, too, an' I've asked some of them.

" Anyhow, I get the wind up good an' proper, an' I go to see some doctors—one here an' one there. It's no good, tho'. They just say the same thing. ' You're dreaming, my boy. Just take

it easy for a while.' Then they give me some pills to make me sleep really hard. But the only effect they have is to make me fuzzy in the head, in whichever the other place happens to be at the time. You remember about two weeks back? You must have noticed it, I couldn't see anybody properly, I was too fast asleep, see. An' as for the other place, why, a few days ago the lions nearly got me. No more pills for me, my boy! "

He says nothing for a moment, and I have time to get used to the way things are. And then I can't help laughing.

" Dai," I say, " this is punishment for all the rubbish you've been talkin' these last two years, it's catchin' up with you. Lion-tamer, too, by heaven! "

And that really starts me off. After the tension of the last few minutes, what with not knowing whether I'm alive or dead, the thought of our Dai pretending he's this man Dingle and wriggling his nose at a couple of lions gives me the hysterics.

When I calm down, " Look, Dai," I say to him, " I can't see what you're worryin' about. While me an' the boys are wastin' our time lyin' in bed, sleepin', you're havin' a whale of a time larkin' about with pussy-cats. If I was in your place, I'd be thankful I got two lives instead of one, an' stop goin' about the place like Lady Macbeth. Make the most of this thing while it lasts. One day you'll go to bed an' you won't wake up until you do."

Dai sits and lets it soak in. Then he grins and says, " You know, Glyn, you got somethin' there."

" 'Course I have," I say, " an' now perhaps you'll go an' ask Mrs. Rhys to make a cup of tea, because that's what I came for, an' not to have you make me wonder which of us is which."

Well, I knew the boy would come to his senses. I told you, nothing in this world could get him down. Everybody's glad he's come round, and I suppose his pals in the other place are relieved, too. Funny thing, come to think of it. But maybe it's better not to. Of course, we haven't told the boys the whole story because, well, you know how it is . . . Anyway, everything is fine and back to normal, and by now they've all forgotten that it's ever been any other way.

Then one morning it comes out of the blue. I'm just off to work, when Mrs. Rhys comes running round to my place like a woman with devils in her: " Have you seen Dai? "

" Seen Dai? No, what's the matter with him now? "

" He's gone," she says, " gone. Went to bed last night an' this mornin' when I go to call him, he's not there Hasn't paid his rent, either."

Well, there it is. He's never come back. Just vanished into thin air, like he threatened me an' Mrs. Rhys. All sorts of rumours about, of course. Gone off with a woman, or run away from the police. One man says he saw him walking down the road with nothing but his shirt and a suitcase.

But it's no mystery to me. Seen it coming all the time. It's them doctors been giving him pills again—and those flamin' imaginary lions got him.

★ ★ ★

SALAD DAYS

One day at Sandringham there was a large luncheon party for the family. King Edward VII was busy holding forth. Next to his plate stood the salad bowl; he kept dipping into it until from the end of the table a small voice cried out, "Grandpapa. Grandpapa." The monarch turned in anger saying, "Little boys should be seen and not heard." This was a severe rebuke, so the little Prince remained silent.

Some time later, the King, relenting, turned to the small boy and said, "Now, David, I have finished speaking, you can tell us what you wanted to say."

"Oh, grandpapa, it doesn't matter now, it is too late—you have eaten the slug."

BARONESS DE STOECKL, *My Dear Marquis*

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to FOOD FOR THOUGHT

on page 90

1. *The crew of the Compass Rose, in "The Cruel Sea," by Nicholas Monsarrat. The ornate tin contained stew.*
2. *Noah, in the poem "Wine and Water," by G. K. Chesterton.*
3. *Mrs. Casey, in the poem "Buttons," by Walter de la Mare.*
4. *The Somonour, in the Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales," by Geoffrey Chaucer.*
5. *Tom and his friends in "Tom Brown's Schooldays," by Thomas Hughes.*
6. *Agamemnon, in William Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida."*
7. *Archy the cockroach, in "archy and mehitabel," by don marquis.*
8. *Dr. Johnson, after dining out, according to James Boswell in his "Life of Johnson."*

CARDS ON THE TABLE

When in doubt, win the trick

EDMOND HOYLE, 1672-1769,
Twenty-Four Rules for Learners

He deals the silk-smooth pack
And says when Mignonne asks—
" Why has each pasteboard back
Its bronze bouquet of masks?"

" Your fan's great pansies, limpid blue,
Involve your deep your dazzling smile,
And so these hearts retain some few
Reflections of Palladian style."

CHARLES SPEAR, *Mignonne*

Trumped Up

" You would like Eric," she said, argumentatively rather than hopefully. Clovis had intimated very unmistakably that he was unlikely to care extravagantly for either Amy or Willie.

" Yes, I feel sure that you would like Eric. Everyone takes to him at once. You know, he always reminds me of that famous picture of the youthful David—I forget who it's by, but it's very well known."

" That would be sufficient to set me against him, if I saw much of him," said Clovis. " Just imagine at auction bridge, for instance, when one was trying to concentrate one's mind on what one's partner's original declaration had been, and to remember what suits one's opponents had originally discarded, what it would be like to have someone persistently reminding one of a picture of the youthful David. It would be simply maddening. If Eric did that I should detest him."

" Eric doesn't play bridge," said Mrs. Eggelby with dignity.

" Doesn't he? " asked Clovis; " why not? "

" None of my children have been brought up to play card games," said Mrs. Eggelby; " draughts and halma and those sorts of games I encourage. Eric is considered quite a wonderful draughts-player."

" You are strewing dreadful risks in the path of your family," said Clovis; " a friend of mine who is a prison chaplain told me

that among the worst criminal cases that have come under his notice, men condemned to death or to long periods of penal servitude, there was not a single bridge-player. On the other hand, he knew at least two expert draughts-players among them."

SAKI, *Clovis on Parental Responsibilities*

Royal Flush

Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell!
Ironic diamonds—clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades,
A congregation piteously akin!
Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit,
Those sooty knaves, precipitated down
With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven:
The paramount ace, a moon in her eclipse,
Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay,
And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained
By royal visages.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *The Prelude*

Last Trick

The next evening Hermann appeared again at the table. Everyone was expecting him. The generals and Privy Counsellors left their whist in order to watch such extraordinary play. The young officers quitted their sofas, and even the servants crowded into the room. All pressed round Hermann. The other players left off punting, impatient to see how it would end. Hermann stood at the table, prepared to play alone against the pale, but still smiling Chekalinsky. Each opened a pack of cards. Chekalinsky shuffled. Hermann took a card and covered it with a pile of bank-notes. It was like a duel. Deep silence reigned around.

Chekalinsky began to deal; his hands trembled. On the right a queen turned up, and on the left an ace.

"Ace has won!" cried Hermann, showing his card.

"Your queen has lost," said Chekalinsky, politely.

Hermann started; instead of an ace, there lay before him the queen of spades! He could not believe his eyes, nor could he understand how he had made such a mistake.

At that moment it seemed to him that the queen of spades smiled ironically and winked her eye at him. He was struck by her remarkable resemblance . . .

"The old Countess!" he exclaimed, seized with terror.

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN, *The Queen of Spades*

Cardsmanship

Christmas is always the season when we want children, above all, to have a good time. But it is also true that children in certain games needing quick movement have a tremendous advantage over us. It is rightly held, in Gamesmanship circles, that they should be handicapped, and the way to do it is this. In a game like Racing Demon (Pounce Patience or Prawn-Eye), children of ten often win because their small hands are defter. Little asides can be given, starting with " steady on." Work on the suggestion that they are being too rough. " No, don't do that, old man."

Then work up a " fear " that the cards will be bent, and continue perhaps, with " mind the table." I have even seen a meaningless but peremptory " mind the carpet " work as well as anything.

STEPHEN POTTER,
Some Notes on Lifemanship

Double Talk

If anybody says conversation in our day is as good as it was in
Dr. Johnson's,
Why, that's a lot of nonsense.
The art of conversation has been lost, or at least mislaid,
And no modern phrase-coiner can think of a fresher word for spade
than spade.
Take the causerie of the most effervescent coterie,
It sounds like something sworn to before a notary.
Where are yesterday's epigrams, banter, and badinage?
All you hear is who behaved scandalously at the club dance and how
hard it is to get a new car into an old garage.
The maxim, the apothegm, yes, even the aphorism, die like echoes
in the distance,
Overwhelmed by such provocative topics as clothes, beauticians,
taxes, and the scarcity of competent domestic assistants.
Come, sprinkle ashes and coffee substitutes upon my head,
I weep for the art of conversation, it is dead.
But wait a minute, the art of conversation is not dead,
see it arise, vigorous, stimulating, and untroubled,
Just as you start to play six spades, vulnerable, doubled and re-
doubled.

OGDEN NASH, *Let's not play Lotto,*
let's just talk

FIRING SQUAD

He began to crumple, to fall, slowly and then faster

by JOHN SALT

EMPTY beer tins littered one corner of the lime-washed cell and another described a slow arc from the hand of the prisoner who thus proclaimed his boredom with life as lived in the State Gaol at Jansumar. The cell was small and the man was large, a loose-limbed fellow of clumsy build, with untidy hair which was too long and had begun to curl around his ears. His face was square and heavy, the colour of old oak, scarred and weathered by the years. Deep wrinkles laced his cheeks and were joined and intersected by smaller ones like the lines in a delta or the tributary veins of a leaf.

With all this there was no suggestion of age. He might have been forty, perhaps a few years older, it was hard to tell. Indeed his bright blue eyes gave an impression of youth, and there was about the man an air of impatience, of boundless vitality barely suppressed. He called himself Peters, which was not his real name, and he was a man who had fought many battles and never troubled himself greatly with either triumph or disaster.

The latest defeat had put him into gaol where he had spent two days since the quarrel with Jao de Borromeda, lord of Jansumar and of anything else upon which he might currently lay his hands. Peters realized it had been a mistake to argue with Jao, the more so with right upon his side, since gorillas are seldom ethical. The interview had ended badly between two files of the State Guard and with the promise of a firing-squad.

Peters had looked wistfully north towards the rain forest when they elbowed him from the Presidencia. He had thought of Miguel encamped there upon Golconda, with his ragged soldiery smoking their pipes in the weeping gloom while the snakes wove a saraband about them and the big tree-cats flashed their lantern eyes through the night. But he had not talked and had since lost interest in talking. He still made plans but the prospect of escape had become purely academic. He would go on scheming until the guards came for him and then he would scribble something upon the wall of his cell. Something very rude about gorillas because that was the way he would feel.

Peters dragged the rough wooden bed against the seaward wall and stood upon it to peer from a narrow barred window. The gaol was hewn from living rock and the walls dropped sheer to deep green water. Out in the bay the fishing craft heeled and flashed like gnats in a sun-dance and a warship strained at her cables in the middle distance, a grey reminder of continental empire, amid the changing lights of sea and sky.

He knew that on the landward side the town climbed in shallow terraces to peter out among trees loose-rooted in shale, and that the timber and the houses were dominated by a dramatic spur of the high Andes, which rim this pirate coast. He expected to see the mountains again when they took him out to shoot him on the Plaza Jorge and hoped he would not have long to enjoy the view since executions were apt to be ragged in Jansumar.

He watched without great interest as Lieutenant-Commander Ira Mackworth, a tiny speck in gold and white, clambered from his warship to a waiting motor launch and headed for the shore. Peters stepped down from his perch and swept a wooden plate across the bars in his cell door until they brought him more beer. Then he sat upon the bed and drank it. He was asleep when a heavy key rattled in the lock and a bandoleered gaoler pushed the door open and stood aside to let Mackworth enter.

The prisoner stirred, yawned, pushed the hair from his eyes, and reached over the side of the bed for a beer tin. It was empty. He rolled forward to a sitting position, his head in his hands. "What's this?" he inquired of the floor. "A reprieve?"

The naval officer was stiff and very correct in his white uniform. "Are you the man Peters?" he asked.

The prisoner nodded and looked up with a grin. "That's me," he admitted. "I'll bet you are the man Mackworth." He mentioned the name of a famous naval academy. "Long time no see. Not since the class of '36 or thereabouts."

Contempt and amazement were about equally blended in the tone of Mackworth's reply, but there was also something else in his manner not quite so easy to identify . . .

"I certainly never expected to find you here," he said.

"Some surprise, eh? In the condemned cell and everything. If I had more time I would bring you up to date on my life but I'm expecting the firing-squad any moment now."

"His Excellency did not tell me that you were to be shot."

"His Excellency? Oh, you mean Jao. No, I don't suppose he did. A man of tender feelings, our Jao, especially about other people's money."

"You seem very comfortable here."

"You mean the beer? We're very democratic in Jansumar. You can have anything you like to pay for and the prisoner drinks a hearty breakfast most mornings."

"Now, see here, Peters, or whatever you please to call yourself these days. You had better listen to me—"

The prisoner put his feet on the ground and stood up. His speech still varied between the colloquial and the precise but he was sober and very serious.

"No, sailor-boy," he said, "you listen to me. Things have happened since your Foreign Affairs Bureau became interested in Andean pitchblende. Murder and sudden death, things like that. I take it you're here to open the official dickering?"

The question was unexpected and Mackworth started to speak rapidly, but Peters cut him short. "Sure, sure. I know the routine. 'Serving officers will not concern themselves in matters political.' Isn't that the relevant clause? Never mind, it's safe to say that you came to show the flag and see how the land lies, whether we are just out to make a swift profit or whether we can deliver the goods as per contract. That's so, isn't it?

"You might as well know that the boy you came to see doesn't live here any more. Your people dealt with old President Encarnación who was a cross between Simon Bolivar and the Angel Gabriel, but lacked the staying power of either. He was too good to live, so they put him up against the cathedral wall and shot him. His Excellency, the gorilla, fired the coup de grâce."

"Borromeda, you mean? Just who is he?" asked Mackworth.

"He was an Army colonel when I went into the rain forest but he was the Government when I came out."

"Then the pitchblende deal is off?"

"Like hell it is. Jao wants your money just as badly as Encarnación ever did, but he'll make the price high because he thinks he holds all the trumps. Also, you are not the only ones in the market."

"And does he hold all the trumps?"

Peters sat down again on the bed. "Reckon he does by now," he admitted sombrely.

There was silence for a moment, and then Mackworth asked another question: "Where do you fit into all this?"

"A fair question," Peters answered with a grin. "You may not understand the ethics, being blinded by experience, but I'll give you the facts. I landed in Jansumar five years ago when Encarnación was forming his republic and looking for a business man. The prospects did not seem too bright but I was in no position to argue at the time. Anyway, the old fellow took a fancy to me and I was able to help him quite a bit. You'll recall

that we both learnt a certain amount of drill and navigation at the school of which you are so eminent a graduate. Well, I have learnt a few things, including field geology, in my travels since then. Pretty soon I was Encarnación's Grand Vizier, Chief of Staff, scientific adviser and head civil servant, all rolled into one."

"It sounds like a job after your own heart. A free hand and no inspectors," said Mackworth, and his tone was bitter.

"I have to tell this my way," said Peters equably. "You need not like it. You don't even have to listen, and it is all ancient history to me. Anyway, you are wrong about the inspectors. There were plenty of them. You might call them the 'have not' brigade. I was one of the 'haves' and I guess that meant trouble in the long run."

"Go ahead," said the sailor. "What went wrong with your tropical sinecure?"

"We were short of money. The economics of this state have been haywire ever since the Conquistadores took to roasting Indians over a slow fire in search of gold deposits which never existed outside their own imaginations. They called this the rich coast just because it was the poorest they had struck. Those old conquerors had a great sense of humour."

"You were short of money," said Mackworth.

"Oh, sure. Encarnación wanted dollars for agricultural development, schools, houses, medical services. I went along with him on that line, but we could neither of us see where the cash was to come from. Then I began to get ideas about uranium ore and that's where your people came in. Dollars for concessions and mining rights. You know the sort of thing."

The sailor nodded. "What happened then?"

"Trouble, boy. Plenty of trouble. As soon as our alleged Army Staff got the idea that there might be the equivalent of hard currency cached somewhere beneath a flat stone, they began thinking in terms of a new Caliph and Grand Vizier. We had to keep just two jumps ahead the whole time and remember not to talk in our sleep. It wasn't easy because I was supposed to be the mining expert and Jao's men kept a pretty sharp eye on me."

"And at the finish they beat you to it?"

"Not quite. I had done a fair amount of prospecting locally and I had a hunch that the mother lode was about three days north from here, up in the forest where it rains all the time. I took half the army up there with me to keep them out of harm's way if Jao started a putsch here in Jansumar."

Peters shot a glance at Mackworth which was oddly appealing. Then he went on: "I'm the sort of character who likes to join a firm when it is young and struggling and leave it before it becomes

a limited company and has to pay surtax. I planned if I was lucky enough to find the lode to turn it over to Encarnación and then sew the deal up so tight with you boys that Borromeda and his gang would never get their hands on it."

"Highly laudable," said Mackworth, unimpressed. "I take it you were lucky. So what happened then?"

"Once I had made the strike I left most of the boys up there on guard with a character named Miguel Danoite, part Indian, whom I figured I could trust. When I got back into town, Borromeda was boss at the Presidencia and we had a fight. I wouldn't talk, but you can't hide a strike of anything when there's a hundred soldiers guarding it, so he sent another party into the forest and slung me into the hoosegow."

"Why the firing-squad?"

"Be your age, Ira. Dead men don't talk, and anyway, I spat in his eye and he didn't like that. Well, there you are. Don't say I didn't warn you." Mackworth had winced at the Christian name, and now he lifted the peak of his uniform cap and pushed a handkerchief across his damp forehead.

"Of course, this is just your story, Peters, and I am bound to say that it does not tally with the version given me at the Presidencia this morning," he said coldly.

The prisoner stared at him a moment and the muscles of his wide shoulders twitched. Then he smiled and relaxed. "Have it your way, sailor, but you'll never make the Diplomatic Corps if you go on like that," he said.

"You think Borromeda knows where the pitchblende is?"

Peters shrugged his shoulders. "He will do very soon. Danoite will have no idea what has happened in town and he'll welcome Jao's party with open arms. The game would be up before he could do anything about it, supposing he wanted to."

"There is no way of warning him?"

Peters shook his head. "Too late, I'd say. The camp is three days' trek into the mountains. We did have some crazy idea of ringing an alarm on the cathedral bells if anything went wrong at this end. The sound would have carried through the valleys. But they jumped me too soon and I never had the chance. I wouldn't be in your shoes, sailor. If your people still want pitchblende they'll have to do business with Jao and he'll have you over a barrel. Too bad I shall miss all the fun. By the way, Ira, on your way out, ask the guard to send me in some more beer. All this talking has made me thirsty again."

Mackworth glared at him, then asked awkwardly: "When is the—when are they—?"

"Going to shoot me? Nice of you to ask. Well, I don't think

Jao will start anything until Danoite gets into town and that will be two days yet. It will be quite a fiesta from all I hear. Bands and speeches and tequila."

"I should like to help you."

"I am glad we agree on fundamentals."

"Is there anything you think I can do?"

"Sure. Get a free pardon. Make it a condition of purchase."

"You know perfectly well that I could not intervene in the affairs of a foreign state," said Mackworth stiffly. "But I'll do what I can. Good-bye—Frank." He held out his hand and after some hesitation Peters took it.

"Now I know you don't expect to see me again," he said. The sailor knocked on the cell door to be let out and Peters called after him as he walked away down the passage outside: "Ira, if you buy that pitchblende, I'll tear up my passport." Then he lay back upon the bed and laced his hands behind his head, watching the shadows spill into the room and fill it with darkness. He thought it would be rather nice to have a passport.

Peters slept fitfully that night. There was a great deal of noise in the town, and this was surprising for the inhabitants of Jansumar had been very subdued since Jao's accession to power. Later he remembered the warship and heard from time to time the shouting and singing of Mackworth's seamen on shore leave. He drifted into sleep round midnight, and awoke with a start an hour later. The night was still at last and yet he had been disturbed by something and he remembered hazily, as in a dream that fades on waking, the sound of a bell.

He lay late the next day and continued to doze the hours away until night came again. There were no visitors, but the guards played poker with him. He spent much of the night peering from the cell window, with hands clenched white around the bars until the stars paled and morning came. He thought it would be his last and recognized from the weather signs that it would be a fine day on which to end.

At eleven he sent for the barber, who arrived in company with the prison governor carrying the note of execution. A priest arrived at a little before noon, and shortly after, a detachment of the State Guard formed up in a ragged and self-conscious line in the corridor outside the cell. Now if ever, the time had come to write a rude word upon the wall of the cell but Peters glanced at the tired grey face of the Jesuit and handed him the last of his money. "Buy a candle for Encarnación," he said.

The clashing of keys and the grounding of rifle-butts announced the moment of departure. The Guard formed up around Peters and marched him out. It was high noon but the streets were

deserted and there was no one to watch the passing of the execution party. They led him through the silent streets and left him with his back against the pink, sun-warmed wall of the cathedral.

Peters glanced around him. Here on the Plaza Jorge were all the people he had missed on the march, all in their very best array to see him shot. State Guards formed a barrier to keep back these good citizens of Jansumar.

The firing-party occupied the end of the square facing the cathedral, and he looked in vain for a marksman among their number. Peters now became increasingly aware of his own mortality. He pressed his hands flat against the wall behind him, feeling the bullet-scars pitted there by earlier firing-parties.

His heart thumped slowly and heavily and a great weight had settled in the pit of his stomach. He thought of the vulnerable skin that covered his face and body, the multiplicity of cells and ducts and glands. He considered the exquisite artistry of the hands he rested behind him against the cathedral wall; the miracle of balance which allowed him to support his tall body upon narrow feet, here on the rough cobbles of the Plaza Jorge.

Behind the execution party a military band had taken up its position, with burnished brass instruments flaming in the sunshine. Behind the band, upon a throne-like dais, sat Borromeda himself, surrounded by a gorgeously clad staff. The sight of so much vulgar ostentation upon so sad an occasion distressed the condemned man and he raised his glance above the dais and canopy and fixed it on the white-plumed mountain-tops beyond.

The square was full of silence and trembling expectancy as Jao rose from his place and walked ponderously across the Plaza in front of the firing-squad. He halted within ten paces of Peters, who realized that his execution was to be made a state occasion, setting the seal of authenticity upon the new régime.

His Excellency glared at the prisoner and the force of his personality was palpable as the heat haze that danced from the cobbles. It was incredible how much the man resembled an ape. Jao wore a full-dress uniform of his own design. A white-plumed shako extinguished his bullet-head, from which coarse black hair grew down to a spade beard covering the heavy jaw. His uniform tunic of scarlet, faced with gold and white, strained across a barrel chest, which shone with decorations. Cartridge bandoleers crossed both shoulders, and one white-gloved hand rested upon the hilt of his heavy cavalry sabre.

Jao burst at once into a torrent of eloquence that splashed spume from his red lips into the convolutions of his black beard. His Excellency spoke of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man; of treachery, courage, endurance, and wisdom. He talked until

he had no more to say and then, as is the custom, began to say it all over again. But when he ceased through lack of breath, the square remained silent, there was no applause. Jao turned upon the crowd, with mouth agape, with arms upraised like a conductor attempting to goad a sullen, unpaid orchestra into symphony—and with as little success.

It was then that he saw the firing-squad and knew that it was not the same. The original detachment had fallen back around the dais and in their place were new men, a small army led by Miguel Danoite, whom Peters had left on guard in the rain forest. Jao recognized the soldier and gave a shout of welcome, but Miguel returned no word.

Instead, he raised a straight arm and a pistol gleamed within the outstretched hand.

His Excellency saw the danger and called upon his devoted Guard who remained firmly in their places. Jao rushed forward a few paces and halted abruptly as Danoite cocked his pistol. Borromeda spun about and tugged out his sabre. He plunged towards Peters, with the great blade uplifted, and then Danoite fired, once, twice, three times.

Even then His Excellency took a long time to fall. It was as if his nerves were numbed, or his brain too feeble to comprehend that he might no longer live. But at last he began to crumple, to fall, slowly and then faster, until he lay dead upon the Plaza with arms outstretched and the white plumes of his shako gently dusting the cobbles.

There was no more shooting after Jao's collapse and Danoite's coup d'état was accomplished with a speed and efficiency that gave ample proof of the unpopularity of the late régime.

Peters returned to the Presidencia in some state and it was there that an apprehensive Army Council, anxious to atone for past shortcomings, offered him supreme power. His acceptance was reluctant and given with the proviso that free elections be held at an early date. He was beginning to distrust power politics.

When the patriots had departed, Peters called for beer and settled himself at ease in a long cane chair on the seaward balcony to discuss his rescue and future plans with Danoite. Inwardly Peters was chastened and shaken—death had come too close—but the face he turned to the Indian was a familiar mask and his tone was casual when he spoke: "What did you do when Jao's men reached the encampment?"

Danoite looked surprised. "They did not arrive," he said. "We met them on the way down from the forest."

"You were able to show them the error of their ways?"

The soldier smiled. " There was some difference of opinion, but it would be kinder not to dwell upon that, as those with the loudest voices can now make no comment, being dead."

Peters nodded his head slowly. " Just so. But if Jao's men never reached the camp, why then did you leave it? "

" Because of the bell, Señor Peters."

Another man might have shown surprise, and Peters certainly felt it, but he took a pull at his beer tin and set it down with the comment: " You know, Miguel, as long as I have drunk from these things, I can't help thinking of it as metal polish. Must be the shape of the tin. You were talking about a bell? "

" But of course. The moment I heard the cathedral bell echoing so wildly through the valleys, I struck camp and urged my men on, night and day, until we reached Jansumar. Not a moment too soon, as it turned out. And yet the whole thing appears to have been no more than a fortunate accident."

" An *accident*, you say? "

" Certainly, for I have since learnt that you did not ring the bell, being in prison at the time. It was some drunken prank of a sailor from the warship in the bay. He broke into the tower and refused to stop pulling on the bell-rope until the Guards dragged him away. There was a fight all through the town, they tell me. But I heard the call, deep in the forest, and obeyed without question. Was it not providential, Señor Peters? "

" You'll never know, Miguel," said Peters and he looked out over the bay to where the lights of the warship winked across the darkling water. " You'll never know."

" One thing worries me, Señor Peters."

" Only one, Miguel? What is that? "

" If we are to have all the things that President Encarnación wanted for Jansumar, to whom will you sell the pitchblende? "

Peters gestured towards the warship.

The Indian seemed doubtful. " But will they do business with a revolutionary government? " he asked.

" They will do business with me."

" You seem very sure, Señor Peters."

The President walked to the railing of the balcony. " Why shouldn't I be? " he said. " I've got a young brother in their Navy, and we like to do little things for each other once in a while."

★ ★ ★

RIME RICHE

Modern poets seem less concerned with posterity than prosperity.

DANIEL GEORGE, *Lonely Pleasures*

ARGOSY'S COLOURFUL NEW NOVEL

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★

Readers—and film-goers—have a surprise in store for them. W. R. Burnett, best known for his tough dramas of big-city life, like "Little Caesar" and "The Asphalt Jungle," now conquers new territory—Dublin in the early nineteenth century, where he sets his swashbuckling new book, "Captain Lightfoot," presented by Argosy, in three parts, before publication.

Burnett has made his home in Southern California—which he prefers to any other part of U.S.A. Something of the colour and gaiety of the Californian sun seems to have found expression in the insouciant touch and sparkling verve of his latest story. This rousing adventure brings a fresh triumph to the versatile author of some 20 novels, plays, films, and short stories—a writer whose earlier successes included an O. Henry Memorial Award, an Academy Award Nomination, and many Book of the Month Club selections.

★ ★

The First Part of

CAPTAIN LIGHTFOOT

★ ★ by W. R. BURNETT ★ ★

IT is time now, I think, to tell the true story of Michael Martin, better known to the people of Ireland generally—though not to his home town—as Captain Lightfoot.

There is no hurt to others in telling his story now; all who were connected with him and could be embarrassed or injured by the telling have long ago receded into the past along with the Old Ireland of our dreams: the Old Ireland of toll roads and coaching and red-coated dragoons and highwaymen on the Dublin road, and trouble in the back country and rebels shipping out from the West to the Americas and robustious but naïve politics, and less Dublin whisky and more of the home-made kind and new songs being invented by the score by country people, songs better than Tom Moore's, and a gentlemanly English tyrant in Dublin Castle—the bad, good Old Ireland.

Michael Martin was born on a farm just outside Ballymoure, Kilkenny, on August 25th, in the year of our Lord, 1795. There was great trouble in the world at the time, a revolution in France and a wave of rebellion against the old régime all over the turning globe. Ballymoure, a backwater, paid little or no attention, and neither did the Martin family. They had their own problems, such as crops and pigs, and how best to age the home-made whisky.

Michael's mother died when Michael was but eleven, and this rather unruly young fellow was brought up by his father, his three elder brothers, and an old patch by the name of Kathleen, who was eighty if a day at this time, smoked a clay pipe, worked all day long in the kitchen, and was less tired at night than the men coming in from the fields.

It is said by some that she did Michael a great disservice by educating him above his station. In Kilkenny at that time there was much illiteracy—in fact, Michael's own father could not read

and write, and his brothers were but indifferent at both, caring for neither. Michael, unlike the others of his family, had a quick mind and a ready wit and took to learning as a horse to hay.

Now, I must tell you a little about the situation in Kilkenny as Michael, wild and unruly and hating the farm, became twenty-one and a man in his own right. To say there was trouble is to say nothing at all. In Ireland there is always trouble; if not, some is quickly arranged. Kilkenny—in fact, a large part of Leinster—was a hotbed of resentment and rebellion. The market-town of Ballymoure was partly owned and completely controlled by Lord Devereaux, an absentee.

My Lord's factor, one Angus Desmond, a Scots-Irishman from Glasgow on the Clyde, was a taciturn, tight-fisted, rigidly honest teetotaller who thought in terms of contracts, documents, signatures, and the letter of the law. According to his lights, he was a good man, I suppose. But his teetotalism . . .! That was an appalling reversal of all the true processes of nature. Why, the man was abnormal! What—not drink good whisky? . . . Angus Desmond was just not the boy for the people of Ballymoure.

Ireland, they say, is a land of secret societies. Due to the "oppression" of Lord Devereaux's agent, Angus Desmond—it was said—a new secret society sprang up in Kilkenny and spread like wildfire over a large part of Leinster until it became a noted and dangerous thing among the rulers of Ireland at Dublin Castle. It was known as the S.F.Y.I.—Society of Free Young Irishmen—and its password was: *How many buttons on your coat?* and the reply was: *Five minus one.* Owing to this password, a new name was gradually put on the Society—the "Five Minus One," and finally its symbol became "5 – 1," a sort of brand.

Michael Martin and his pal, Tim Keenan, joined the Society of Free Young Irishmen, and I leave you to guess for what reason.

The Society met in a ruined monastery dating back to the eleventh century. It was a good meeting-place because the country people of Kilkenny—the older folks, particularly—felt a cold terror of the "old grey ruin," as they called it, and gave it a wide berth.

A couple of tall, well-masked candles lit the meetings, which were held among the huge, fallen, moss-covered grey stones. Still-standing great walls loomed high above them in the darkness. The setting gave a great portentousness and mystery to the humdrum reading of minutes and the other dullnesses inseparable from such gatherings of men all the world over.

While the young bloods, like Michael Martin and Tim Keenan, picked their teeth in boredom or tried, under the cover of semi-darkness, to hug one of the many girls who had joined in with the men, the high officials of the order made speeches. One man spoke to the point: Regis Donnell—the leader, though only twenty-seven years of age. The people of Leinster had great faith in Regis—he was their man. And he was no fanatic, but a man of goodwill, a moderate.

Michael Martin and Regis Donnell had little to say to each other, though they were friends. In the first place, they were miles apart in almost anything you could name. They agreed about one thing only: Catherine O'Herlihy.

This Catherine, though the daughter of an ordinary farmer, was the beauty of the place: Spanish-black hair, big black eyes, straight black brows, and a creamy Irish complexion. She was laughing, witty, and with a mind of her own. Her family was greatly flattered by the well-to-do Regis Donnell's attentions to her, and as for Mike Martin, they threatened to take a stick to him if he did not stay away, with his blue eyes and his tenor singing voice, so well liked by Irish girls.

But Catherine apparently could not see a straw of difference between them. She was serious and ladylike with Regis; romping and gay with Michael. When Regis importuned her to marry him, she told him that she was not ready yet for the " horse-collar of matrimony," being only nineteen; and when Michael, whose last thought was marriage, grew too bold, with her black eyes dancing in mirth she asked him: " What are your intentions, Mike? "

And when he replied: " The worst, Cath, the worst," she slapped him hard and sent him on his way, but brought him back to the gate by laughing light-heartedly and then sent him away again, still unsatisfied.

To his cronies, Michael referred to Catherine as " the Dream." He was delighted with her because she was able to resist him. He respected her. " Why, begob," he said to Tim Keenan, " even when I sing her the *Bride of Mourne*, it's like nothing had happened. She resists the *Bride of Mourne*. Incredible! "

And one day Tim said, shrugging: " It's in the cards. She'll marry the Donnell and be a big woman in Ireland."

" And good luck to her, then," said Michael sincerely. " She could marry a worse."

" Yes," said Tim. " *You*—and your stud of country girls."

And Michael suddenly got mad, and Tim, knowing him well, ran from him and hid. But half an hour later they were singing over their whisky while the whole tavern listened.

Michael often had the whole tavern listening. Too often. And that, in a sense, led to his first big trouble. It happened that evening, as if destiny was party to the business, that Angus Desmond was having his frugal supper in a back parlour of the inn, alone and with one candle. He was eating porridge and drinking buttermilk—enough to turn the stout stomach of Michael, who saw the lanky Scots-Irishman through a partly open door. He also saw on the table beside Angus a small black bag, and he knew, as did everybody in the town, that the black bag meant money—Angus had been out collecting the rents.

And in the middle of a song Michael turned to Tim and asked: " Didn't I hear that the blessed ' 5 – 1 ' needed money? That the dues of many are uncollectable through poverty? "

Tim Keenan stared in surprise, but nodded. Neither he nor Michael had ever paid any dues at all.

" Well, then," said Michael, " fetch me mine host's brass-bound pistol. You'll find it at the end of the bar."

Once in the street, Michael explained what he was going to do. At first Tim laughed, thinking it a great lark; then suddenly he sobered and said, " Mike! It's highway robbery. A capital offence. They'll hang you at the next assizes as they hanged Patrick Flemming and Paddy O'Bryan in the bad old days."

But Michael was very well fortified against anything that smacked of sense and only laughed. " What—hang me for borrowing money from a usurer? Why, that would be contrary to King's Law."

But Tim Keenan was not that drunk. He begged, pleaded, and expostulated, but to no avail, and finally he departed.

Michael waited impatiently for Angus, whistling a back-country jig, and when at last he saw Lord Devereaux's steward coming, he pulled a white neckerchief up over his face, presented his big pistol at Angus's breast, and remembering the highwayman tales of his childhood—remembering Patrick Flemming and Paddy O'Bryan and also remembering the whispered exploits of the newest knight of the road, Captain Thunderbolt—he cried loudly in an awful voice: " Stand and deliver! "

Angus gave a jump; then he laughed and said: " Michael Martin, you are drunk, so do not try to fool me with this highwayman masquerade, but stand aside." Then he laughed again. " Highwayman, where's your horse? "

Now Michael, as you know, had a very quick temper, and these gibes infuriated him. " What—can a Scot see through a handkerchief? " he cried.

And then he hit Angus hard on the point of the jaw with his left fist, and Angus went down like a pole-axed steer, and Michael grabbed up the little black bag, flung the pistol back towards the inn, and made off fast to the monastery with enough money, as he was well aware, to set him up in business for life. But money, as money, was not and never would be Michael's cardinal concern. At the moment, all that he thought about was the faces of those of the " 5 – 1 " when they saw the bag of gold.

Michael found a goodly crowd of young members waiting, so he jumped up on the rostrum, poured the gold out on an old wooden farm table, and made a speech, and even sang a song about the wrongs of Ireland to tremendous laughter and applause. Even Catherine O'Herlihy did not seem to realize the seriousness of what had happened, and told the other girls in a delighted voice: " Mike Martin is the greatest buck in the county."

But it was a different thing altogether when Regis Donnell appeared, followed at a distance by Tim Keenan, who was shaking with apprehension. Little by little Regis Donnell made them understand what had happened. Armed robbery on the highway was a capital offence. Michael could be hanged for it, and oh, what a wide embarrassment that would be!

" Yes," said Michael, " then my face would be red indeed."

After the laughter had died down, Regis gathered up the gold pieces, put them back into the black bag, and said that he must at once return the money to Angus Desmond and plead with him that no report of the matter be made to the authorities; otherwise the dragoons would descend on Ballymoure in full force, and they all knew what that meant.

" Well, in that case," said Michael, " I resign from the Society. You are all a bunch of fools making unnecessary and meaningless noises in the night. Talk, talk. And where will that get Ireland? "

" I will take up the matter of your expulsion from our Society at my leisure, Mike," said Regis.

" You will take nothing but the back of my hand, you Englishman," cried Michael, and to the horror of all, he tried to strike Regis Donnell, who merely stood looking at him sadly.

That gesture cooked Michael's goose. Nobody ever raised a hand to Regis. He himself would not raise a hand to the dirtiest and meanest cur dog lying in the middle of the Ballymoure highway. It was like a sacrilege to think of striking Regis.

The meeting broke up in confusion. Michael, sober now, tried to take Catherine aside and talk to her, but she would not listen, brushed him out of her way, and went with Regis into town to see Lord Devereaux's steward, who was lying at home with a great blue lump on his jaw and a badly damaged ego.

The next night after supper, Michael was surprised to see Regis Donnell and Tim Keenan approaching the house along the road. He went out at once. Regis offered him a wallet, and both he and Tim began to talk at the same time.

" Wait! Wait! " cried Michael. " Does it take two of you to expel me from the Society? And what is this wallet? "

" Listen to me, Mike," cried Regis impatiently. " Take this wallet and go at once. Get out. Angus Desmond has changed his mind in spite of us returning the money. He has gone to the authorities. The bills will be out on you for robbery, and the dragoons will be here before morning. It's a hanging matter till it cools off, Mike, so don't delay. Get out at once—now."

Michael was bewildered. " But, Regis, for the love of God, where does a man go to run away? "

" There are three sovereigns in the purse, enough to see you through to Dublin, a great city, where a man can hide himself from the dragoons, melt into the crowd. Take the country roads parallel to the great Dublin road, or, better still, the woods and fields, but keep a sight always on the road so you will not get lost."

" And good luck to you, Michael," said Tim Keenan, weeping a little. " 'Twas all that Bonnie Prince Charlie whisky did it."

" A slob is what you are, Tim," said Michael, " but my friend, and thanks for the wishes. And as for you, Regis, be damned to you and your parliament of talking, do-nothing Irishmen. I will do something. Mark me."

When Michael's anger cooled, he put the wallet into his shirt with a shrug, stuffed a fresh pair of hose and a change of underwear into his pockets, and set off across the dark fields towards a country lane and the whitewashed stone house of John O'Herlihy.

Though only a little after eight of the clock, it was already dark at Catherine's. There wasn't even a glimmer of light showing anywhere. Buffer, the big mongrel dog, did not bark at Michael's approach, but hurried over to him and licked his hand.

Catherine slept in a little curtained-off alcove at the back of the house; slept with her window shut and barred, as was the custom in those long-gone days. Buffer watched curiously as Michael picked up a few pebbles and tossed them at the window. After a long interval, Catherine, in a heavy, voluminous white nightgown, appeared at the window and looked out. When he explained what had happened and told her that he was leaving Kilkenny for Dublin and the great world beyond, she began to cry and kissed him passionately and wept a little. And Michael said: "And so you love me, then."

"I don't know, Mick; truly I don't know," cried Catherine, all upset and weeping. "Sometimes I think so, sometimes not. You are a drunkard, Mick, and a ruffian; and I'm sure you will come to no good end. Father says so, too; and all the others of the family."

"To hell with the likes of the O'Herlihys. A Martin is just as good any day."

And then they quarrelled, and finally Catherine slammed the window shut in a rage, waking the whole house, and Buffer barked in glee, and John O'Herlihy appeared with a blunderbuss, and there was much yelling and carrying on before Catherine could make them all understand that Mike was going away to Dublin suddenly and had come to say good-bye.

"He's going away?" cried O'Herlihy, the father, while the sons laughed with relief. "Why—fine, fine! And good luck to you, Mick. Make a great name and stay in Dublin. That's the place."

But Michael was delighted in spite of all because Catherine, pretty as a sunrise and fresh as the dew thereof, kissed him good-bye in front of all of them, standing there only in her nightgown and her bare feet, with old O'Herlihy glowering and fondling the blunderbuss.

Buffer saw him to the gate and licked his hand good-bye. A big moon was rising over the dark fields. Michael looked back and saw Buffer standing there watching him go, and he felt a great lump in his throat, and so he broke out whistling a lively tune called the *Tinker of Armagh*, and Buffer barked and other dogs answered him from far away and near—and this was how Michael Martin, aged about twenty-two, set out for the great cosmopolitan city of Dublin in the year of our Lord 1817.

As you know, Michael was a green hand. He had never before been farther from Ballymoure than the ten miles to Blackfountain, where they raced the home-grown Irish thoroughbreds in the

middle of the summer. Time after time he got lost and wandered in circles in a wood, trying to catch a glimpse of the Dublin road without showing himself, till finally he lost his temper and said: " Be damned to this," crossed a wood and a field and a farm, and came out at last on the great Dublin road itself, which stretched off ahead of him, flat, straight, endless but promising, towards the far-away capital city on the Liffey.

Excitement began to grow in him as he walked along the king's highway like any free, unmenaced citizen, whistling the *Tinker of Armagh*, paying little attention to things about him.

Then Michael saw a crossroads, and a big parson in black coat and white tabbed collar riding in a cart pulled by a fat pony and turning from the side road into the main highway . . . and he was thinking what a big, impressive-looking man the parson was when, from behind a tall hedge at the side of the road, a lone red-coated dragoon on horseback eased out with a sabre in his hand and in a rough, authoritative voice told Michael to halt in his tracks or he'd split him from head to heel.

" And for what? " cried Michael.

" Because," said the dragoon, " you are a wanted man with bills out on you, and a ten-pound reward. Eh, Martin? "

With hardly a thought in his mind, his body acting almost of itself, Michael left his feet in a tremendous diving leap, took the dragoon full in the belly with his head, and they both sailed through the air from the saddle and fell to the ground on the other side with Michael on top, the tall hedges screening them from the roadway. The sabre went through the air in a long arc and fell ten feet away with a loud clatter of heavy metal. Michael hit the dragoon several belts on the jaw, and the dragoon lay as still in the dust as Angus Desmond had lain at Ballymoure from the one punch only.

Michael glanced down at the dragoon, knew that he'd be there for a long time to come, then he eyed the dragoon's fine horse. It would get him into Dublin in style; then he walked over to pick up the sabre. But he heard a footfall and looked up. The big parson he'd seen in the pony cart at the crossroads was looking at him round a hedge. The parson had remarkably bold, black, unparsonlike eyes.

" Leave the horse and the weapon, man," said the parson. " 'Twould only make it worse for you if caught."

" And who the devil are you? " cried Michael. " And what business is it of yours—a Protestant? "

" My son," said the parson, " you are a likely lad, and it aches me to see you in trouble. Come with me. I'm on my way to Dublin—by a slow route, it is true, as I have to make many stops, owing to my profession, but I'll see you safe there at last. I warrant it."

" And why should you see me safe, a wanted man? "

" Why, because I'm a Christian, my son; and I like neither the English dragoons nor the lords of Dublin Castle."

Michael stared at him suspiciously, but horses went past on the

highway, unsettling him somewhat, and finally he took off his hat, and scratched his head, and said, " Well, I'd as well trust you as another, parson; but—look, now—I am no man to tamper with. I must get to Dublin uncaught. That's all."

" I warrant it," said the big parson.

Michael got into the cart with the parson, who clucked to the strong, fat pony and they were off down the side road, which wound among fields of oats, showing in the distance the straight chimney-smoke of small farmhouses.

" As you see," said the parson, " the cart is full of pamphlets and holy tracts, and if we are flushed—as pheasants in a covert, that is—hide yourself among the tracts and leave the rest to me."

Michael said nothing. Thrust among the tracts was a huge bell-muzzled blunderbuss. After a moment, Michael asked, "And the weapon, parson?"

" It's loaded with nails. It is to protect myself from the petty malefactors of the back roads."

Near sundown and many miles away from the Dublin road they were flushed indeed, by half a dozen dragoons, and Michael hid himself among the tracts with his right hand on the blunderbuss. But the dragoons were respectful with the parson and listened with interest to the following: " You are far off your course, gentlemen. I saw the man you want at the Dublin road. He was making his way across the fields to the hills. You are miles off your course."

And the dragoons thanked the parson, saluting, and galloped off down the country lane towards the Dublin road.

" Begob," cried Michael, emerging from among the tracts, " you gave me a true word, parson."

" Ay," said the parson shortly, and clucked to the fat pony.

They were well suited at the mossy old country inn, which had stood on this ground since time immemorial. The parson took a big room with two beds and called for a bottle of country whisky and a tableful of food.

And when they were through and the remains had been carried away, the parson sat back with a sigh and smoked a white clay pipe with a long stem and put his feet up. Michael studied him narrowly. There was something about this parson . . . Well, what a parson! Bigger than himself, wider, heavier, with a strong, smooth, bold face and a formidable dark eye. An ill man to cross, it was obvious.

Finally he had a wild thought and gave a start. " How many buttons on your coat? " he asked abruptly.

" Why, five minus one, naturally," said the parson, laughing.

" Begob! " yelled Michael, and then he jumped up and did a furious jig to his own mouth music, and presently the big parson jumped from his chair, breaking his pipe, and joined in the jig, his coat-tails flying . . . but then all at once he gave a loud bellow of pain and sat down abruptly. Michael stopped, astonished.

" Damn you, you wild back-country gossoon! " cried the parson. " You've made me forget myself, when I shouldn't."

And now he stripped down his coarse stocking and showed a bad wound far round in the calf of his left leg, and Michael stared as before. The parson whipped out a large pocket-knife, held it to the candle-flame for a moment, then handed it to Michael.

" There's a pistol-ball in that leg," said the parson. " Dig it out. It's behind me. I can't reach it."

Too full of pride to refuse, but sweating badly from distaste and apprehension, Michael knelt, and after a long nerve-racking search, finally found the ball and dug it out. The parson gave a muffled bellow or two and sweated as badly as Michael, but when the ordeal was over, he clapped Michael on the back, praised him highly for a brave, steady fellow, and called for more whisky.

" You puzzle me, parson," said Michael, recovering after a long drink.

" Ay! But the puzzle will soon be over. Look, lad. I need one like you in my business."

" What business? *Five minus one?* "

" Why, yes. If you put it that way. You are a bold fellow, Michael—though you need guidance, and I will be your mentor if you say the word, and I'll make you rich. 'S faith, how many young gentlemen of the road have struck for two hundred pounds on the first try? "

Michael was dumbfounded. " Gentlemen of the road? "

The parson took from an inside pocket a bill. It was for the apprehension of one Michael Martin, and the reward was ten pounds; it said Martin had robbed Lord Devereaux's high steward of two hundred golden sovereigns on the open road by force of arms. " Where did you get that? " Michael demanded.

" I am interested in such things," said the parson, and then he drew another bill from inside his coat and handed it to Michael. It was a King's poster—no local thing: very important. It was for the capture, dead or alive, of John Doherty, *the notorious murderer and highwayman, known as Captain Thunderbolt.*

Michael read the description in awed silence, and when he glanced up at the parson at last, his mouth was wide open and there was a chill along his spine and he wanted to rise and run back to Ballymoure—for he was, he knew, just a country lad, after all, and not one to be associating with this celebrated knight of the road, whose depredations and cruelty were known all over Ireland from the west to the east.

" Well, now," said John Doherty, " you know me. I've trusted you. Did you note the reward? Five hundred pounds—an unheard-of rich sum for the body of a man, you'll say—and yet this carcass is worth it and more, much more. In Dublin I am a rich man. I must get back, that's the only problem—and I have a leg wound—and you must see me back."

" I'll do what I can, sir," said Michael, " and you saving my life, and a joiner of the ' 5 – 1 ' like all proper bucks."

Doherty slapped Michael on the shoulder, and pushed him back into his chair.

"Well said, Michael. Well said. Right at the moment we've got business. You see, there was a little difficulty in Dublin, so I took ship for Waterford on the Suir. I was pursued, you understand, but I slipped away. Now the trouble is over, and all I need to do is get back. I heard they were watching the ships at the small ports, so I came back by land, but I've had my troubles, lad, many troubles—including a ball in the leg from a gentleman from whom I borrowed a small sum of money. My purse is getting very slim . . ."

"I have three pounds," said Michael.

Doherty roared. "Oh, the simplicity of the fellow! Three pounds, is it? A tip for one pretty doxy, nothing more."

"Three pounds?" cried Michael, horrified.

"Listen, lad. We'll soon be in Dublin and flying high. But we may have to borrow a little money from some rich gentleman. You see, if you are taken without money, there is the devil to pay. But if you are taken *with* money, why, there are those who will smooth your way. You see? Well, well, you'll learn. Take no chances with poverty. But once in Dublin, my sister, Lady Anne More—"

"A titled lady?" cried Michael, astonished.

"Why, yes," said Doherty. "The Lady Anne has a fine mansion of her own and good connections in the town. Fine beds for us, Michael, with expensive linen sheets, servants, food for the gods, French brandy of the best. What do you say to that?"

"Why, it sounds like a dream," said Michael.

"And so," said Doherty, dipping his fingers in the whisky, "since you will help me and be my second, you must have a true professional name—and I will christen you as follows"— and here Doherty flicked some whisky into Michael's face—"I christen you—what shall it be?—yes! Captain Lightfoot."

It was broad morning now, the sun was almost halfway up the sky, and the larks were singing in the fields. Doherty and Michael, with the pony-cart and the fat pony near by, were loitering among the high hedges of the Dublin road, waiting, as Doherty said, for "prey." Michael kept glancing at Doherty, who was a new man, and a fine figure of a man, in gentleman's dress, with half-boots, and a hat with a cock feather in it, and a slim gentleman's sword at his side.

Some peasants' carts passed along the road; then a jaunting-car, which turned off the main highway and followed a track through the fields; and then a drover going to market with a score of fine black cattle; and then nothing for a long time—until finally a pillar of dust appeared down the roadway, fast-moving dust.

Doherty perked up and said, "Remember, now. Grab the lead horses by the bridle and watch the driver or the postilion, as the case may be."

Now the vehicle came into sight, a smart calash pulled by two powerful black cobs, with a driver in gold-and-grey livery: no postilion. It was such a rich-seeming equipage that Michael was overawed, but Doherty stepped out at once with the wicked-looking blunderbuss, and the calash came to an abrupt stop. Michael jumped to the horses, grabbed the bridles, then looked at the liveried driver, who had a tough Irish phiz and began to grin at Michael and winked one eye slowly.

Michael stared and then whispered, loud enough for the driver to hear: "How many buttons on your coat, man?"

"Five minus one," answered the driver and winked again.

Beyond them, the following conversation ensued as Doherty "borrowed" some money and other objects from a bored-looking English lord in a uniform: "What—a highwayman! You look like a gentleman."

"And gentleman I am," said Doherty. "You may see now that ill luck may sometimes befall a courtier who follows nothing but inconstancy, admires nothing but beauty, and honours nothing but fortune."

"Well spoken," said the English lord. "It's a pity I shall see you hanged at Dublin Castle, sir; a great pity. And now, I mind not my hundred guineas and pistoles, and my gold snuff-box, and my two diamond rings—but I would appreciate it greatly, my man, were you to return my gold watch. It has a sentimental value beyond price."

"To me, my lord," said Doherty, "while I respect sentiment, your watch has a great *monetary* value, and that at the moment is the important thing, though later I may have leisure for sentiment."

"I see," said the English lord. "Yes, yes; a terrible pity that a man of such great parts as yourself should be hanged, but never forget the saw:

Little villains must submit to Fate
That great ones may enjoy the World in State."

Doherty bowed at this and gave the lord back his watch. "I see that you, my lord, are no hypocrite and understand the true workings of the world. Good day to you, sir."

Michael stood aside, the driver cracked his whip, and the calash drove off.

"Now," said Doherty, "we are almost ready for the rest of our journey—we have at least three hundred pounds' worth of what is vulgarly called booty. We sell the fat pony and cart, buy us two fine horses—the best only. A fine horse is one that leaps a high hedge, a wide ditch, and a five-bar gate. They are not to be stolen. Keep watch while I get into my parson's rig, then we'll be off through the back country again."

It was night. The lights of Dublin winked ahead of them through the thin, blowing mist, and Michael's heart was beating like a hammer on an anvil.

Doherty gestured expansively. "Dublin. Our town. Now

we leave the highway and ride by the river. It's safer, and I know every foot of it."

Little by little, Dublin came towards them as they walked their horses along the embankment. It seemed so vast to Michael that he felt a sort of panic and longed for a moment to be back in little old Ballymoure, where he knew every face, every stone in the roadway, every tree, and every dog.

"We rest the night at Nine Steps in the stews. It's an unsavoury neighbourhood, but we are well taken care of there. Big Tom is a friend to us all, and we are protected from constables and informers alike. Mahony, the blind harpist, who sings like a lark, keeps watch on the front pavement—he is not so blind after all, you see—and when danger approaches, which is seldom, Mahony plays and sings the *Highwayman's Song*, softly if the danger is not great, loudly if great, and he bellows if it's the Lord-Lieutenant's men. Mahony has not bellowed for many a year, as the Lord-Lieutenant's men have had too many broken heads in that neighbourhood and are now wary. 'Tis a fine thing to sleep peacefully among friends."

"That it is," said Michael, staring about him at the big warehouses, the quays, the thronged gin-shops, and the lights—the forests of street-lamps, casting golden-yellow zigzags into the black water.

They had a fine big room on the fourth floor at Nine Steps—or so it seemed to Michael—and there was a wide prospect from the window out over the narrow streets of the stews, with, beyond, dimly seen through the mist, the masts and spars on the river and the riding-lights swaying gently with the tide.

Doherty fell asleep at once, but Michael, used to the country quiet of the Ballymoure farm, turned and tossed as the bleakly unfamiliar sounds of Dublin at night drifted in through the open windows.

And presently an old cracked tenor voice rose on the night, accompanied by a harp, and the voice was singing the *Bride of Mourne*, and Michael listened, and pretty soon a tear or two stole down his cheeks. The *Bride of Mourne*! The old back-country story of the poor betrothed girl who did not quite live to see the hour of her wedding, though she heard the summoning bells—all set to music of such gentle sweetness that it melted the heart.

"Damn old Mahony!" cried Doherty suddenly in the darkness. "He will sing those damned old back-country, moss-grown, gruesome songs, enough to make a man's hair stand on end, sad as a debtor's tale who wishes not to pay."

"He sings very fine for an old man," said Michael, who should know. "Very fine indeed."

"And talks even better," cried Doherty, sitting up with a curse. "Talked his way from the gallows with the help of a priest. Benefit of clergy. Reads and writes as well as I do myself, and I'm a school-educated man."

"From the gallows?"

" Ay! In his time Tyburn still stood in London—Mahony's nearing eighty. They banished him to Jamaica's Isle, but he was back in a year, across all that water, three thousand miles of it, I hear. Yes, Mahony's quite a man, though he's like a reformed drunkard—the worst sort of bigot. He will warn you to lead a life of holy toil and then you will not end a half-blind harpist in the streets of Dublin. Don't listen. That old one is handed many shillings a day, guineas even. He's rich, I'm told. And for what? Even if they bury it with him all in gold, the worms won't eat it."

" He was a highwayman, then? " asked Michael.

" Ay. And a pirate, too, so he says. Mahony is a great one for talk, and vain about building himself up in past evil so as to contrast with present virtue—though he keeps the watch for Nine Steps and hates a constable as a thief hates an informer. Go to bed, Martin. Sleep. Tomorrow the sun will shine on our doings, and once you are in gentleman's clothes—mark me—you will feel and act like a gentleman. The way of the world."

The song ended below, then Mahony broke out with another jig and there was the scuffling of dancers. In a moment Doherty began to snore. Michael went back to bed and lay with his hands under his head, looking up at the faint patterns of reflected light on the ceiling. Here he was, in Dublin!

The tailor came at one o'clock. He was a little dancing fellow with a dark Italianate face. From time to time, as he was being tried and suited, Michael addressed him politely as " Mr. Stitch," and got a black look, and heard a strange coughing sound from Doherty; until at last the tailor tore off his measure and threw it across the room, and Doherty collapsed against the wall, doubled over with laughing, and the little tailor cried: " My name, sir, an it please you, is Signor Perini. I would be obliged, sir, if you would call me by that name and not by the common and facetious designation of my trade."

Michael lifted the little man from the floor by the front of his coat and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

" Don't raise your voice to me, man," cried Michael, very much embarrassed and feeling like a bog-trotter of the far west country and furious because of it. " I'm a stranger in Dublin. Give me a chance. The fellow Doherty referred to you as Mr. Stitch. How was I to know it wasn't your true name? "

Doherty intervened and laughingly apologized to little Mr. Perini, whose face was almost black with rage and humiliation.

Michael kept glowering—to top it all, the man was a foreigner, with strange foreign ways, and should he be reproving a true Irishman?—but Michael's expression changed to one of abashed and astonished wonder when he saw himself in the cheval-glass in the dress of a gentleman with a slim sword at his side, varnished half-boots, a hat with a feather, a dark-blue coat with red facings, and a canary-yellow waistcoat with deep pockets and gold braid.

" If those at the Bonnie Prince Charlie could only see me now! "

he cried, preening himself like a young girl getting ready for her first ball.

The rest of the day till candle-time Doherty spent showing Michael how to draw a sword, how to thrust and parry, how to advance and withdraw. Doherty was astonished at the Ballymoure boy's aptitude and determination. "You'll do, lad. You'll do," he kept saying.

And then later he went patiently into all the mechanics of handling and loading, unloading and reloading a pistol, till Michael was almost ready to drop with weariness.

"You'll do, pistol or otherwise," said Doherty, "and now we'll have a light repast, and then a hackney coach to Lady Anne's, and some gaming and a supper at midnight, and then perhaps a coranto or two with the fillies, eh?"

"A what?"

"A dance. A dance. What—don't you know the coranto?"

"No," said Michael, bristling. "A foreign dance, I'm sure."

But Doherty showed him, humming an air, and when the Negro maid, Bessa, came in with the tray, she almost fainted at the sight of these two big, broad-shouldered, brawny Irishmen daintily dancing the coranto together.

It was nearly ten o'clock when they set out in a coach for an evening of pleasure at Lady Anne's—and to stay there the night, and for many nights to come, Doherty insisted, rubbing his big hands in delight. As for Michael, he was half asleep in his corner of the coach. What—start out at ten for a party, like a chicken thief, while all respectable folk slept? It seemed abnormal.

But he woke with a bang when he saw Lady Anne's mansion and the liveried callers and doormen and the blazing lights and the equipages along the street, and heard the sound of violins and hautboys and the chink of gold coins and the subdued, thrilling laughter of real gentlewomen.

And then inside, the elegant furniture of English design, and the chandeliers with a thousand candles, it seemed, and the smooth polished floor reflecting the lights with a golden shimmering, and the silver, and the well-dressed, polite, bowing men, and the lovely ladies whose décolletage embarrassed him so that he didn't know where to look—what a plethora of pink nakedness!—and the heavy scent of flowers and perfume, and the winking of great jewels under the candlelight—and then, there suddenly was Lady Anne More smiling at him—a statuesque blonde woman with her hair piled high, and wide, oddly shaped green eyes of such a brilliance as to dazzle him. Michael felt faint, bowing before her as Doherty had taught him. What a place for Farmer Seumas Martin's youngest boy, Mick!

"Your servant, ma'am," said Michael, trying not to get entangled with his sword.

"Why, the man's handsome, Jack," said Lady Anne, turning to Doherty. "Captain Martin, is it? Welcome, Captain. Welcome."

And then she had to turn away to greet a slim old buck of sixty who had been announced by a bawling footman as: " His Excellency, Lord Clayton."

And Michael stared at the lord as if at a tiger, and Doherty, noting the stare, hurried him off to show him the house.

Michael never said a word as Doherty led him through the huge, elegantly furnished mansion, room by room. Now and then he gave a sharp exclamation of surprise and awe, but the words wouldn't come. He was stunned—and wandered through the many candle-lit rooms like a sorely troubled man walking in his sleep.

But finally Michael was moved to speak: " Gob, your Lady Anne must be richer than the greatest usurer in Ireland."

Doherty winked his left eye slowly and pursed his lips. " Lady Anne, is it? You're looking at Doherty's Castle, lad."

Michael was staggered. " But Lady Anne—what of her? "

Doherty roared, then sobered. " Why, she lives here, minds the place for me. Shall we go back downstairs? "

They went down to the dancing-room, where an elegant rout was disporting itself, and Doherty danced a coranto with Lady Anne More, to the delight of everyone. A pretty sight, this brawny, dark-haired man and this tall, statue-like, golden-haired woman, dancing in the blaze of candles to the expert music of French musicians. Michael stood back against a wall, watching. Beyond, through huge, wide-open doors, he could see the gaming at the faro bank tables, and could hear the calling of the dealers.

A moment later, a small, handsome, black-haired girl accosted him and asked him if he were for the dancing, the gaming, or the reception rooms upstairs. Her dress was so low in front, showing a soft, deep cleft, that Michael kept his eyes on the gilt moulding around the ceiling and said in a shaky voice, " Why, I'm for looking on at the moment, dear one."

The girl laughed. " What a nice Irish voice you have, and how nicely you say ' dear one ' as if you meant it."

And at that Michael's instincts overcame his shyness, and he grinned and said, " There's no great difficulty in a man calling you ' dear one.' It should be easy as breathing."

And then he lowered his eyes from the moulding and looked at her, and he felt his blood rising. A lady, this, and yet careless of her charms, very careless. What if her dress should fall off altogether, and from the look of it, it might!

The girl's smile stiffened, and Michael turned. Doherty was bearing down on them.

" What have you been saying to him, Ara? " Doherty demanded.

" Why, nothing at all," the girl replied, showing what Michael took to be deep agitation, maybe even fright.

Doherty said brusquely, " This is Captain Martin, my second, a young lad who will go far. Captain, this is Araminta McDonald, a Scottish girl."

Ara seemed overcome, and a flush showed on her neck and

bosom. She curtsied to Michael, who stood staring at her in amazement; then made off quickly towards the gaming-room.

"If you want a girl, let me know," said Doherty. "A lady of quality, eh, lad?"

"I pick my own girls," Michael replied stiffly.

Doherty stared at him hard for a moment, then finally he shrugged. "Well, well; you've a lot to learn, and you can't be expected to learn it all in one night. Be guided by me; that's all I ask."

Michael felt very uncomfortable, like a man taking part in a masquerade against his will. "When do we leave?" he demanded.

"Leave!" shouted Doherty. "We don't leave at all. This is our home."

Later Michael stood alone, watching the dancing. It was getting very late, and he was sleepy and began to wonder when these people made off to their homes and went to bed. But more kept coming.

And then at last there was a great commotion at the door, bells rang, and there was loud bawling and shouting from the footmen, and side doors seemed to burst open of themselves, and women screamed, and in a moment the stairway was full of struggling humanity—and Michael stood frozen as threescore High Constable's men, led by a tall fellow in a red officer's coat, converged on the gaming-room in a flying wedge.

And now suddenly it was all like a nightmare to Michael, who stood staring. He saw from the corner of his eye Doherty escaping by a back window, helped by Lady Anne More and Ara, the Scottish girl. He heard Lady Anne More's indignant, peacock-like cries, and finally he came to attention as a constable's man cried, "See the quality safely to their carriages, Malone—take three men. I'll look after the trulls and pimps—a nice haul!"

And then Michael saw three brawny constable's men roughly handling a harried flock of women, who were screaming and lashing out with their feet, and Michael's blood rose to boiling-point. He forgot that he was a "gentleman," he forgot his sword—and leaping in at once, he battered the three men about the hall in good old Ballymoure Fair style, and ignored their amazed cries of "Sir! Sir! What are you about?"

Till finally half a dozen of them bore him to the floor and tried to reason with him, but, having no success, they bound his arms behind his back with straps and arrested him, as they said, for his own sake.

"Wild drunk, this fellow," said one of the constable's men. "An hour or two behind bars will cool the temper of the young gentleman."

A minor magistrate sat behind a high desk, smiling at Michael, as an officer of the constabulary explained what had happened.

"Ah yes," said the magistrate. "And may I ask your name, sir?"

" I give no name," said Michael sullenly.

" Quite right. I understand," said the magistrate. " But, sir, while I do not choose to take note of your having been apprehended in a house of ill-repute—that's your affair—I must, you understand, take note of your violence towards officers of the law."

" They were manhandling the ladies."

An officer whispered to the magistrate. " He was drunk as a lord—begging your pardon, sir—drunk as a lord. A most violent young man, and strong as the bull of Bashan."

" You saw with befuddled eyes," the magistrate went on. " Now, I feel sure that a young man of your quality does not want to be remanded to a cell, but I have no choice unless . . ."

" Unless . . . ? " asked Michael.

" Of course," said the magistrate, " I could fine you, but the fine, according to the new code, would be very heavy indeed, and then if you couldn't pay it, you'd be thrown into the prison for debtors, and there the way of release is hard. I have no choice in this matter, I'm sorry to say. But actually, it is very simple. A person of quality must vouch for you. Then I sign a release, and that is the end of the matter entirely."

Michael was silent, not knowing what to say or do. But at that moment there was a slight commotion in the ante-room, then a huge bailiff entered and bawled: " Lord Clayton, Your Honour—to see you on the matter in hand."

The constable's man straightened up and stood at attention, and the magistrate put on a strained, obsequious smile.

Lord Clayton, the little shrivelled buck Michael had seen at Lady Anne's, entered stiffly, attended by a huge flunkey in livery.

" Your Excellency," murmured the magistrate.

" Why have you arrested this fine young man? " shouted Lord Clayton.

" I was about to release him, Your Excellency," said the magistrate, fawning, while the constable's man turned white.

" Well, then, consider him released, damn it!" Lord Clayton turned to the flunkey. " See the Captain to the coach, Myles. I'll attend to the details."

Blindly bewildered, Michael went out, followed by the towering flunkey.

Now Lord Clayton drew out a bulky purse, but the magistrate cried, " It's only a matter of a signature, Your Excellency. Nothing more, an't please you."

Lord Clayton put back his head and laughed. " What—an honest magistrate! Dublin, Dublin, what is happening to you? "

The magistrate smiled feebly and offered a book for Lord Clayton to sign. When it was done, Lord Clayton handed the magistrate his snuff-box, a beautiful thing of gold and enamel, and then he tipped the constable's man, who flushed heavily and bowed low. The magistrate took a pinch of snuff and made a move to return the snuff-box, but Lord Clayton wheeled abruptly and went out.

" Forgetful as a lord," said the magistrate, pocketing the expensive snuff-box, and the constable's man grinned broadly.

Michael was astonished to find Doherty waiting for him in Lord Clayton's coach. Doherty was rocking with laughter as Michael was helped in by the flunkey.

Doherty said, " The last I saw of the lad, he had constable's men strewn all over the carpet. Martin, what a brawling Irishman you are! "

" What happened? " asked Michael, and Doherty almost fell on the floor of the coach, laughing. After a moment Michael said, " Will you stop nickering long enough to tell a person why Lord Clayton bailed him out? "

" Why, he's a close friend of mine," said Doherty. " Why else? I am able to do many favours for the old boy, who loves women and gaming and hasn't a pistole to his name—nothing but a grand title, the lustre of which he's tarnished badly."

Michael sat shaking his head in bewilderment, and finally Doherty said, " Well, lad, it's back to Nine Steps for us until Lady Anne can find a new mansion and move the furniture."

Lord Clayton's coach dropped them at Nine Steps, and the old man raised his hat politely as he drove away, and Michael returned the salute and bowed low. Doherty mocked him by outdoing his bow and sweeping the ground with his hat. But Michael was too tired to care.

Doherty woke very early for him, but Michael was already at the window. It was raining gently and mistily, a real Dublin summer rain, and the old city was a silvery grey in colour, the chimney-pots shining like billycock hats.

After breakfast and a brief, laughing tussle with Bessa, Doherty felt philosophically inclined. " There was this Roman writer," he began, " a fellow of the name of Petronius. He said a true word: ' It is not wise to place much reliance upon any scheme, because Fortune has a method of her own.' Let us take last night. For weeks I'd been longing for the Mansion, and the ease and luxury of it, ready to settle down for who knows how long a time. When I was on the road, running from the dragoons, I thought of it as paradise." Doherty hesitated, then said, " Lad, there is only one paradise: paradise lost."

There was a knock at the door, and opening it, Michael found Big Tom on the threshold.

" Captain," said Tom, addressing himself to Doherty, " there's an unsavoury fellow to see you whose name I pronounce only if absolutely necessary."

" Pronounce it."

" Clagett, the informer."

Doherty's face darkened and his lips set grimly. " To see *me*, you say? "

Tom nodded. " He says he wants nothing, only to help you, like a friend."

" A likely story. Clagett helps Clagett. But send him in, Tom."

A strange-looking little man with something vaguely nautical about him came in after a moment, cringing and fawning before he was halfway through the door. He was poorly dressed, but there were several fine cameos on his thick fingers, and when he whipped off his hat you saw that he had a tarred pigtail like an old-fashioned pirate, and that he was wearing a gold ring in his right ear.

" Captain Doherty, your servant," he said, bowing. " Young gentleman, your servant—whoever you may be." Clagett glanced significantly at Michael, but said nothing.

" You may talk in front of the lad," said Doherty, " or keep silent and get out, whichever pleases you more."

Clagett cringed and smiled at the same time, showing large, yellowish, badly discoloured teeth. " Ah, Captain, you know well I've never done you a disservice."

" And for good reason. I'd see your throat was cut for it if it cost me a thousand guineas."

" Exactly. And yet a man of your acquaintance has just done you a disservice of the greatest magnitude, and you are doing nothing about it at all."

" And the fellow's name? "

Clagett hesitated, then spoke quickly: " The one they call Sir George Bracey."

" That rogue! But what has he done to me? "

Clagett laughed unpleasantly, but cringed away from Doherty, who glared. " It seems, sir," said Clagett, " that Sir George has turned informer—a gold-braided one, for certain—and has sent the High Constable's men down on you at the Mansion."

" What? " cried Doherty, his face dark with rage.

" As a friend," said Clagett, " I tell you this. I want nothing for it. Nothing."

" You lie," said Doherty. " Perhaps you lie all round. But I might believe you if I knew what you wanted out of it. Not that I doubt Sir George is the worst rogue in Ireland."

" Well," said Clagett, " Sir George has set up a gaming-place of his own on money borrowed from an usurer. His business has been a little slack, while Lady Anne has prospered beyond anything yet seen. So Sir George played the informer for the High Constable. With you out of the way—"

Doherty broke in. " I begin to see you may have the right of it, Clagett. And where is Sir George to be found? "

With surprising alacrity, Clagett whipped out a piece of paper and handed it to Doherty, who glanced at it briefly. " Ah, quite a nice address. Very nice. And now, Clagett—what do you want out of this? "

Clagett gave an evil grin. " I want nothing of you, nothing. Only your goodwill, Captain."

" My goodwill you shall never have, Clagett," said Doherty. " But my thanks—yes."

Clagett nodded. " You see, being a man of integrity myself, Sir George's prosperity at the moment irks me sorely, he is heavily in debt to me. Good day to you, Captain; and to your close young friend."

Clagett looked Michael over carefully, then withdrew.

" Sir George, is it? " cried Doherty, raging about the room. " Set constable's men on me, will he? Chase me from my paradise? Michael, we've got business tonight—the two of us."

" And what business is that? "

" Why, to collect poor Clagett's dividends," cried Doherty.

That afternoon while Doherty was getting dressed to go out, he noticed that Michael was sitting on his bed, lost in thought. Finally Doherty turned and asked, " Is something bothering you, lad? Your face is as puckered as that of a parson on Saturday night, thinking out a Sunday sermon."

Michael sighed. " I don't grasp it at all."

" And what's that? " Doherty demanded. " Maybe I can explain. I'm a great explainer." He laughed loudly as he began to hitch on his sword.

" Well, Doherty, I may be green—I *am* green, heaven knows—but how is it that you're so well known, with bills out and a huge reward, and yet you move about in Dublin as you please and call yourself Doherty in the open? "

Doherty threw back his head and laughed. " Lad," he said, " you understand neither the law nor the perversions of the law. In the first place, there are many men in Scotland and Ireland of the name of Doherty; and then, what's to prevent any rogue at all from calling himself John Doherty or even Captain Thunderbolt? A man must be caught on the spot, you understand? If I am taken, they must charge me at once and produce witnesses to prove that I am veritably Captain Doherty, or Captain Thunderbolt. Otherwise I am mere Captain John Doherty, of the same name, a well-known man in sporting Dublin, with fine connections, mark you, such as Lord Clayton, and others I could name.

" Don't think so hard, and stop wrinkling your brow. Again, remember. You must be taken on the spot—or red-handed, as they say. So you may rest easy about Captain Doherty, Captain Martin-Lightfoot."

Ready to go out, Doherty turned. " Now, good-bye. I'll be back for the evening meal. You stay close. At Nine Steps you're safe. I have business." He went out with a swirl of his coat, slamming the door.

That night when he and Doherty were preparing to go out and pay Sir George Bracey a call, Doherty said, " Listen, I've news for you. After we've paid our respects to that great gentleman, Sir George, we'll sup with Lady Anne and the little black-haired Ara. They've found a nice nest for themselves, pending removal to the new mansion we've got our eyes on. What do you say? A roast chicken and a bottle or two of claret with the women, and

a nice fire, and to hell with Dublin and its rain and mist for the night."

Michael perked up at once, his face flushed pink, and the natural optimism of his nature took charge once more. "Why, fine, Doherty. A remarkably pretty girl, Ara. The idea suits me as hardly anything in Dublin has suited me up to now. Will it be long before we see her?"

"Not long," cried Doherty, clapping him on the back.

They went out laughing.

The fine thoroughbred horses they had bought on the way into Dublin from the south were ready saddled for them at the stables at the back of Nine Steps, and they rode northward through a large alley, crossed many streets and avenues, bewildering to Michael, and finally came out on a broad thoroughfare lined with tall old trees where hackney coaches, calashes, gigs, and vehicles of all kinds were bowling towards town and away from town, passing and repassing beneath the mellow, flickering lamplight falling from tall standards.

Doherty laughed. "Excitement in the air. Women about. Fine horses. Plenty of gold guineas. Something stirring. That's the life, lad! We'll be a long time dead, and then who will care? A pox on the virtuous life, the flannel nightcap, to bed at nine with the stale wife of your bosom, church on Sunday, business during the week—and heaven for reward. A pox on't!"

Little by little the traffic thinned, the thoroughfare narrowed, and after a while the houses were more widely spaced until it seemed that they were almost in the open country. Doherty reined in at last and pointed with the butt of his whip.

"A lovely spot for us," he said. "If there's trouble—which I don't anticipate—you understand, we escape northward into the open country. We have better horses than any of the dragoons or constabulary, and who is going to worry about the rest? Under cover of night, no one can overtake us. That's if there's trouble. If there is not, why, we amble back to town, and in half an hour's time we'll be supping with our ladies and drinking claret and toasting our toes before a cannel-coal fire in a pink and mirrored boudoir. Eh, lad?"

They halted in pitch darkness. A high wall loomed over them, and beyond the wall there were the big lighted windows of a large mansion.

"Sir George does well for himself," said Doherty, as they dismounted. "Now, lad, you are to remain with the horses and guard the rear approaches. You must not run away, no matter what happens. Stand firm. You have sword and pistol. Defend yourself if necessary, but do not run away, and do not lose the horses. Tally-ho, lad. I'm off."

Now Doherty adjusted a mask. "The best carnival mask I could find. It has black lace on it and slanted eye-holes. Why, they'd take me for a Venetian trollop if it wasn't for the breeches! Stand firm, lad."

Michael stood in the darkness at the gate, watching Doherty go. He crossed a long formal garden, disappeared in the shrubbery, then reappeared again at a higher level, crossed a terrace, and went boldly in at a french window, which was open to the night.

Michael heard a hullabaloo inside, then silence. He stood holding his breath in the darkness, feeling lost, alone, befuddled, inadequate, but completely resolved to do his duty and prove his mettle. Loud voices rose on the night. Somewhere a door was banged. There were feminine shrieks.

Then, at last, Doherty burst out through the french window and made for the shrubbery, but in a moment a bare-headed man burst out after him with a huge upraised sabre in his right hand, and the man was crying: " Doherty, you filthy rogue! You swine! Doherty, I say! "

And at that moment, Michael gave a loud gasp and almost abandoned the horses. Doherty had tripped over a root and fallen to the lawn, and the bare-headed man had slashed him with the sabre. On the ground Doherty seemed to turn swiftly. There was a red glare in the night, lighting up the bushes, and the shattering report of a pistol. The bare-headed man dropped his sabre, reeled backwards across the terrace like a drunken man falling downstairs, then plunged headlong into the shrubbery.

No one else appeared, although there was much shouting and screaming. Michael stood firm, but his heart was beating so heavily it was jarring his chest. Doherty dragged his right leg across the formal garden and through the gate.

" So much for Sir George," he said jeeringly as Michael helped him onto his horse and then mounted his own.

" Back to town," cried Doherty. " He slashed me bad in the back of my right leg. I'm bleeding like a stuck pig."

Behind them the shouts and screams died away as they tore off down a back road towards the far-away misty lights of Dublin.

" Good boy," cried Doherty. " You have won your spurs —you've drawn first blood. I peeled the ratlike scoundrel of a good four thousand guineas, and I let the moonlight into him, besides. 'Twas his own fault, the fool. What—pursue me with a naked sabre? Asked to be given his *quietus est*, the fellow did."

They galloped in silence for a while, then Doherty reined into a walk and Michael followed suit. " No use killing the horses," said Doherty. " We're not pursued." After another silence Doherty said, " If we don't stanch this soon, I'll be too weak to walk up the one flight to Lady Anne's nest. We must stop."

They turned off the road into a clump of bushes, dismounted, and Doherty lit a wax match to look at his leg. " This calls for a tourniquet at once," he cried. " Fortune, thou bitch! Doherty tripping over a root when he was away clean! It has never happened before."

Michael helped Doherty with his leg, and at last the flow of blood was stanched and a handkerchief bandage tied in place.

All at once, a blunderbuss spoke thunderously out of the darkness, and for a moment there was a panic of men and horses as Michael and Doherty mounted and finally got away through the clump of bushes and into the meadowlike open country, with the river glimmering in the distance like a silver platter in the moonlight.

" An ambush, by the gods! " cried Doherty. " And I'm tagged again—in the arm."

They rode hard towards the gleaming river, pursued by a score of horsemen who seemed to materialize out of the darkness.

" Dragoons! " cried Doherty. " And where in heaven's name have they come from? " Then he laughed loudly. " All on broken-winded cobs procured for them by some thieving government horse-factor. Let's show 'em what kind of horses we ride, lad."

And Doherty belted his horse with the whip, and Michael followed suit, and they were off, with the wind screaming round them, and they took a high hedge with never a bobble, then a ditch, then a wooden bridge over the river, and then another series of hedges and three wide ditches, and then they were in flat, grassy country where the going was marvellous, and little by little they lost the dragoons and were soon riding alone in the moonlight.

Towards dawn, Doherty's pallor became so noticeable that it began to trouble Michael greatly. They turned off at the first by-road and walked their horses for nearly an hour before Doherty began to sway in his saddle.

" I'm beat, lad," he cried finally. " It's a thing a man does not like to admit, but there comes a time . . ."

They had halted.

Michael turned to glance at Doherty. He gave a start and jumped off his horse at once. Doherty's face was a livid green colour. Suddenly, with a husky groan, Doherty turned in his saddle and fainted. Michael tried to catch him, but Doherty was too heavy and a dead weight now, and they fell to the road together, with Doherty on top.

After a brief struggle Michael managed to get out from under him, produce the brandy bottle, and force a little of the liquid into Doherty's mouth. In a moment Doherty's eyes opened; he blinked rapidly, took in the scene, and came back to reality with a start; then, to Michael's surprise, he laughed.

" By heaven," he cried, " 'tis my first faint. What a pass Doherty has come to when a man has to force good brandy down his throat! "

As Michael, leading the horses, helped Doherty to a grassy bank in the midst of a dense clump of bushes, Doherty said: " Now, there is a time for running and a time for thinking. This is the time to think. Did the ambush seem somewhat strange to you? "

" It did," said Michael.

" Ay! Passing strange. I think we may well say that Mr.

Clagett arranged the little party at which we and Sir George were the honoured guests. Now if I was a fool, which I trust I'm not, I'd rush back to Dublin and cut Clagett's throat. He is counting on that, and they will be looking for me. And Mr. Clagett will have shipped out to Liverpool on one of his many mysterious voyages; the fellow is a pirate at heart—and was in fact, I hear—and can't keep off the sea.

"Lad, I have a brilliant plan. First, I wore a mask at Sir George's. Sir George thought he recognized me and called out my name. But is that evidence? It is not. Second, we have made famously good time because of these 'noble steeds'—Lord, how I love a good horse!

"I'll send letters back to Lord Clayton and Aire's fifth son, Clonmel, by the fast mail, telling them I'm on my way to Scotland for a little trip for my health and to see my poor old father—who hates me, by the way, as the devil hates holy water—and there is evidence, if you like! The letters will be dated Belfast, so how could I have been in Dublin the night Sir George met his well-merited fate? You see, Doherty has a head on his shoulders and intends to keep it there. Lad, there is only one difficulty."

Michael sat looking at Doherty with admiration. Here was a man, indeed. But in a moment he came to himself and asked, "And what may that be?"

"Why, Doherty, lad. Doherty himself! Can he make it, empty of blood as a wrinkled wineskin is of wine?"

"I think he will make it," said Michael firmly.

"Ah, well said," cried Doherty, delighted.

But their whirlwind ride was no laughing matter. To Michael, it seemed like a protracted nightmare as they galloped northward over back-country roads, endlessly; except for one stop of a few hours for rest, there seemed to be neither day nor night, but only a blurred greyness—the very colour of fatigue.

It was after ten o'clock now, and ahead of them they could see the widely spread-out lights of Belfast. It was raining, and a nasty-seeming wind was blowing treetop-high across the open country, and the great branches were tossing wildly and making a fearful racket overhead. They were walking their horses along a country lane. The horses, with such a short rest, were now as badly spent as the men, and it was becoming a question if they'd make it.

"It's not long now," said Doherty, "and then the quays of Belfast Lough, a boat, and home. Ah yes—home to Glasgow, with all its rows of little mean houses, just alike. A barren place, lad. A barren place indeed for an Irishman, but home."

They skirted the town and came out at last on the quays, where the boats were rocking wildly at anchor and the hawsers were sawing and creaking and the timbers of ruinous old hulks were groaning; and overhead the riding-light tossed and swung as in a hurricane.

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They dismounted. Doherty went into a quay-house with a man in oilskins, and Michael took the horses into the shed and unsaddled them and bedded them down and gave them water.

As Michael made his way towards the blurred lights of the quay-house, how far away the pleasant fields of Ballymoure seemed in the driving rain of this far-northern port with Scotland just across the black, tossing waters! In all his life Michael had never been in a boat of any kind.

The rain was driving almost horizontally as they took the horses aboard, and a whistling wind was blowing in from the east across Belfast Lough. Doherty had gone below. When the ship put out on the Lough, Michael went down a battered little companion-way to the cabin.

The ship was already creaking and groaning as if in mortal agony, and the roll and pitch startled Michael to such an extent that he expected the ship to turn turtle at any moment.

At the bottom, the big Irish mate grinned at him. "The Lough an't half so bad as I thought it'd be, sir," he said. "It's right smooth, considering."

Michael stared at him in amazement.

"Smooth, you say?"

"Ay!" said the mate. "I'd heard it was much worse. This is but a roll and toss, as you might say; soothing to the soul."

Michael left him, unable to think of a reply.

Doherty, fully dressed, was already in his bunk.

"Oh, but it feels good to lie down, lad. Let her roll. The roll I don't mind, as long as I stay horizontal. Get in the bunk. It sails easier that way."

Michael took off his boots, propping himself against a stanchion to do it and nearly falling on his face at the roll. In a moment he was in the bunk and heaved a long sigh. "Doherty, I believe you're right, man," he said.

He felt himself drifting into sleep, in spite of the creaking and groaning and the rolling and pitching, so he sat up and looked over to see if Doherty was all right before he permitted himself to lose consciousness. Doherty was drinking from the brandy bottle.

"How are you?" called Michael.

"I'll make it, I think. I'll make it," Doherty replied weakly. And then Michael lay back and instantly fell asleep.

He woke beside his bunk, with his feet high against a stanchion and his head covered by a blanket and Doherty's feet in his face, and the ship was rolling and pitching like a feather in a gale, and Doherty was cursing with almost normal strength, and above them the light swung and banged and swung again, and Doherty cried, "It's like the time a hunter threw me at a five-bar gate!"

And, little by little, they disentangled themselves, got back into their bunks, and held on grimly to keep from being thrown out again. And a short while later the mate put his head in the door. "We've hit the open water, gentlemen; and she an't so bad as expected."

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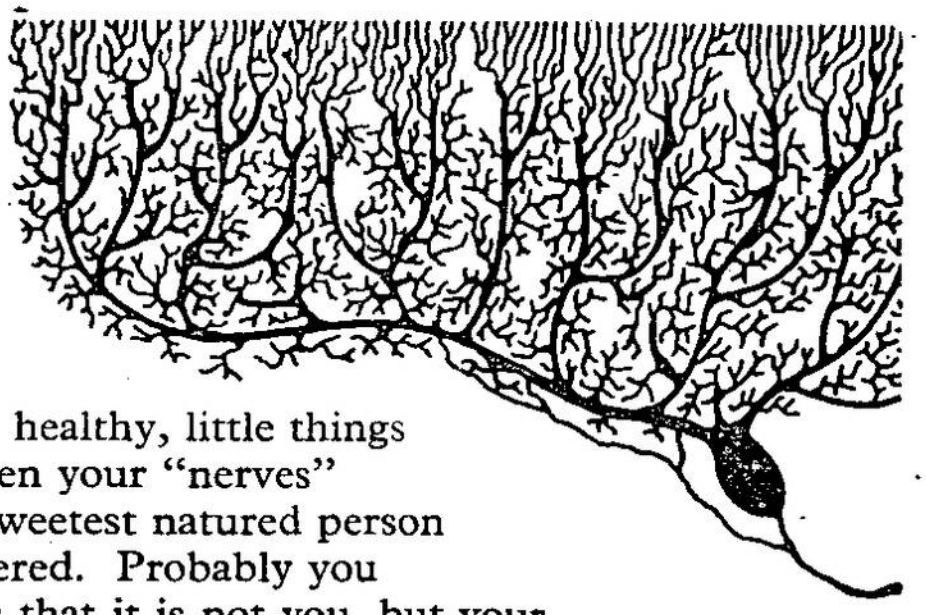

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"You mean," gasped Doherty, "we just cleared the Lough?"

"Ay!" said the mate; then he whistled a bar or two of an Irish jig and went on: "And the crew's mighty happy, gentlemen. We was feeling maybe we'd gone too far for once for extra pay, but it an't so. 'Tis a routine blow—nothing at all. Sleep well, gentlemen. God be wi' ye."

The pitching got neither worse nor better, and after a while they grew used to it, and both drifted into a troubled sleep. Michael had been heartened by Doherty's manner and he slept, more at ease than he'd been since Doherty had suddenly plunged from his horse on the back-country road near Belfast.

But at dawn it was a different matter. Doherty was delirious. He kept asking them where Anne was—and why didn't she bring him his breakfast, and why was Ara not about the place, and where Princey, the dog, was . . . "The elegant little white fellow," Doherty cried. "The best friend I have in this sorry world—mark me!"

And then finally he went back to sleep, grumbling about his breakfast, and Michael, feeling lost and abandoned again, sighed and went up on deck.

Michael's first sight of the wilderness of grey pitching waters almost sent him below. Little by little, he fought off his feeling of panic, and moved forward cautiously, bracing himself against the jerking roll. Far to the north-west he could make out a black line, like a pencil-mark on the misty grey horizon—land! Immediately he felt heartened, though still nervously fearful in these bleakly alien surroundings.

They made port at Prestwick that night, later than they had expected, but early enough. On the quay Doherty said, "I can never ride to Glasgow, lad. It's twenty-five miles as the crow flies, but longer by road. Here is what you must do. Leave the two thoroughbreds for surety—they are worth all the cobs in Prestwick and Ayr—and hire us a fine calash and driver. We'll go home in style, so. Hurry. My body wants to take the horizontal again, and I'm master of the brute only so much longer."

It was very late when they entered the outskirts of Glasgow, and Doherty, who had been dozing fitfully and talking to himself, came round now and excitedly began to point out places and name names to Michael. The calash bowled along through the sleeping streets at a good pace. Michael was somewhat shocked at the look of Glasgow—bleak and ugly, it seemed to him, harsh and unfriendly.

"One or two turnings and we're there," said Doherty, his excitement rising, becoming feverish. "I haven't seen it—oh, it's years now. The master is getting quite an old man, a good seventy, perhaps more. I hope that Trim and his son, Trim II, are still about. Trim II fought at Waterloo, lost his left hand. A great fellow, Trim II—and no boy any more, since he's my age and I've just passed forty."

Then suddenly Doherty gave a loud, strident shout that startled

Michael badly. " Here we are—the damned old prison of my boyhood—home! "

Michael got a quick glimpse of a rundown-looking brick manor, crowded in among many poorer houses. Then Doherty fainted and fell to the floor of the calash.

In spite of the ensuing confusion, the halting explanations, and the amazement of the Doherty household, Doherty was finally carried to a bedroom on the second floor by two tall, pale, heavily built, placid-looking men—the Trims, father and son—helped by the little driver of the calash and by Michael.

Doherty's father, a big bald man with a touch of Doherty himself about the eyes and the mouth, looked on at the proceedings with a sort of grim irritation. " Not drunk this time, eh? " he said curtly, and Michael turned and glanced at him in surprise.

" He's in a bad way, sir," he said. " You must send for a doctor at once."

Old Doherty regarded him in silence for a moment, his shaggy eyebrows moving slightly in thought. " And who may you be, young man? By the look of you, fresh from some place, despite your fine clothes."

" My name is Martin, sir," cried Michael impatiently. " I'm your son's best friend, as I think he'll tell you."

" You don't look that wicked, lad—but perhaps your face belies you. His best friend, is it? Well, man, don't brag about it. Have you ever heard word of a friend of Lucifer's? He may have had some, but all would deny it."

Now Michael's impatience turned to anger. " A fine way to talk of your son, sir, with him lying near to death in your own house."

Old Doherty laughed jeeringly. " Him die? No such luck. He's been like this before—and he always comes home. In fact, it's the only time he *does* come home, the rogue! "

But at that moment Trim II came hurrying down the stairs, followed by the little, bewildered, flushed driver. " I must go for old Dr. Cates, an't please you, sir," he called on his way to the door. " I've never seen Master John in such a state as this before, sir."

" As you will, Trim," said old Doherty indifferently.

" I'm feeling a little better tonight," said Doherty, lying white and still on his big bed, " so we must have our talk, lad. Pass me the brandy."

Michael rose and gave Doherty the bottle, and after a long pull Doherty said, " If I do not make it, Michael, you are my surrogate —you take over for me in Dublin. When I am roasting in hell, I at least want the satisfaction of knowing that my place has been filled by an adequate substitute, and that all my enemies, who have been waiting for years to see the end of Doherty, will be discomfited. Trim II will go with you. He's been out with me before, and he's a brave and likely hand.

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" Ay," cried Michael, " with my life! "

" And there's Clagett. But he is not a present trouble because he will stay in Liverpool till word of my plight or my return reaches him. When you return alone, he'll be back. I would see him fixed, Michael."

" Ay! " cried Michael. " I'll do my best."

" I have already written to Lord Clayton and Aire's son Clonmel. They are powerful protectors, but you must keep them in money, lad; and you must look after their interests otherwise. Consult with Lady Anne. And, lastly, I've written her. She will be fearful till you return." There was a long pause. " You'll find three thousand guineas and more in this drawer . . . And now to sleep. Sleep, lad . . ."

Michael rose, walked to a window, and stood looking out into the night. Where would he be in another month? Would he ever see Ballymoure again and lovely Catherine, the Dream—and would he ever again pat the rough coat of Buffer, or sit beside his own father's hearth in the big, beamed kitchen, listening to the Kilkenny rain falling outside and the tea-kettle singing on the hob . . .?

Doherty was snoring faintly now. Michael turned and tiptoed quietly away.

It was very early in the morning, not much after three, when something woke Michael and he sat up in bed with a start and looked about him, shivering slightly with the cold. The small fire had died in the room, and there was a chill wind blowing across Glasgow. The house seemed silent, and he wondered what had wakened him, and he was just lying back when he heard a thumping down the hall, cries, and then the crash of an overturned chair.

It seemed that the noise was coming from Doherty's room, and that was a thing that puzzled Michael greatly, so he leapt from bed, flung on a dressing-gown Trim II had put at his disposal, opened his door, and went out into the hall to listen.

At once he heard Doherty's voice, strident as ever and strong, and immediately a feeling of relief rushed over Michael—the great man was mending, obviously, and Michael's panic at the thought of facing Dublin all alone and fulfilling a mission he but vaguely understood slid away from him like a dream: with Doherty at his side, all would be well!

And then he heard the voice of Trim II begging and pleading

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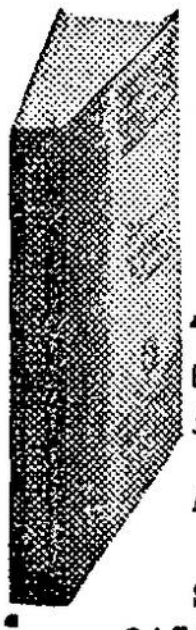

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with Doherty, and once more there was the sound of a chair overturning, and a faint crash as of breaking crockery, and then old Trim chimed in in a cracked voice, and the struggle went on. At last Michael began to realize that there was something shockingly unnatural and ominous about all this. He went down the hall to Doherty's room and opened the door.

★ ***The second part of W. R. Burnett's "Captain Lightfoot" appears in next month's Argosy on sale November 10.***

In next month's ARGOSY—DAVID WALKER —JOHAN FABRICIUS—ARTHUR GORDON

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 15

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's fifteenth Prize Crossword Competition :—

Mrs. P. Bonnard, Comber Road, Carryduff, near Belfast.
Roy Owen Esq., Pant Glas, Tregarth, Bangor, Caerns.
F. J. Stoker Esq., Oakfield Road, Cannon Hill, Birmingham.
N. L. Vaness Esq., 15 O.M.Q., Edith Weston, Rutland.
D. R. Wilson Esq., Yelling, Huntingdon.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Billet doux.* 6, *Slam.* 10, *Amusing.* 11, *Best man.* 12, *Agape.* 13, *Sun-bonnet.* 14, *Lyons.* 16, *Criticize.* 18, *Joy-riding.* 19, *Hence.* 21, *Court card.* 24, *Sarah.* 25, *Article.* 26, *Uplands.* 27, *Sire.* 28, *My goodness.*

Down. 1, *Bradawl.* 2, *Laudatory.* 3, *Exile.* 4, *Dégas.* 5, *Unbending.* 7, *Lemon.* 8, *Manatee.* 9, *Astonish.* 15, *Sciatica.* 16, *Chicanery.* 17, *Ignorance.* 18, *Jackass.* 20, *Ephesus.* 22, *Utter.* 23, *Douro.* 24, *Solid.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 18

Argosy's eighteenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 18), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp), to arrive by Tuesday, November 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale January 7th, 1955.

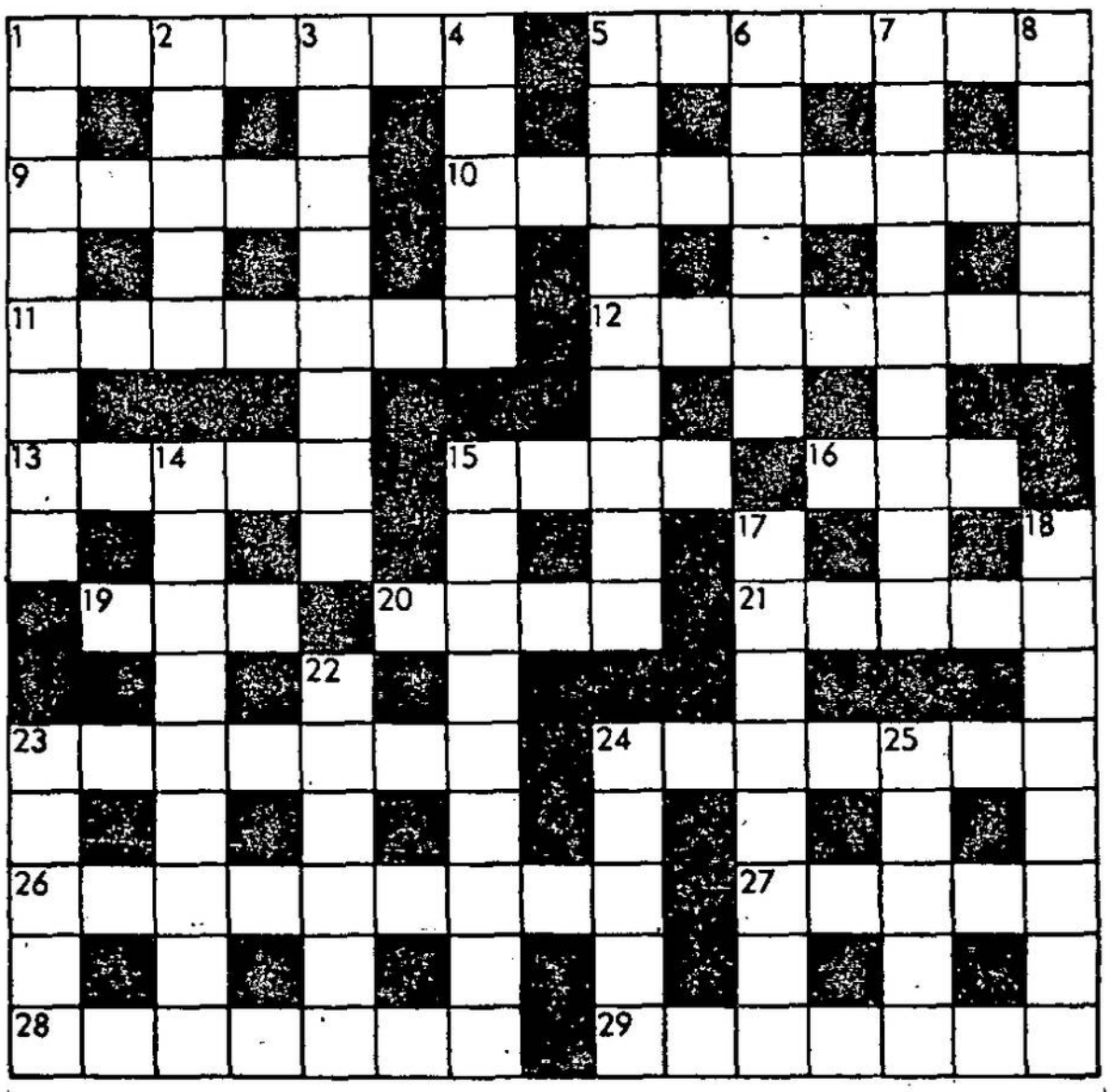
PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 18

★

Rules of Entry on Page 143

★



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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 Choose one tool to make another (7).

5 Bunyan's optimistic pilgrim (7).

9 I scold—naturally, I'm angry (5).

10 Two wickets fall in a thoroughgoing manner (3, 3, 3).

11 A rebuke that might benefit a mackintosh (7).

12 Ran to a dear Frenchman who owns cattle (7).

13 Apparently this garment was not come by honestly (5).

15 Cut the flower to form a platform (4).

16 To cook like this is insignificant when small (3).

19 Turn the tap (3).

20 Egyptian goddess in Oxford (4).

21 Can you get over this fashion? (5).

23 The Court poet loses a pound but is still golden (7).

24 The policeman with an H to his name becomes cutting (8).

26 The actors seem an unpolished lot (9).

27 A marked fall—of plums, perhaps (5).

28 Extravagant poet? (7).

29 Has this North American sunbathed unwisely? (7).

Down

1 The summer flower, when formal, is a spring one (8).

2 If you munch like this you'll fall short of the title (5).

3 One names these flowers (8).

4 Ibsen thought little of him (5).

5 The *jeune fille* is an alternative to success (3, 2, 4).

6 Peg Nan into Malaya (6).

7 Dupe a West-country novelist? It's reckless (9).

8 Real tea? By and by, perhaps (5).

14 Even a poor tune, *piano*, can come in handy (9).

15 A pride, sir, may fall into decay (9).

17 "My ——, my latest found, Heaven's last best gift" (Milton) (8).

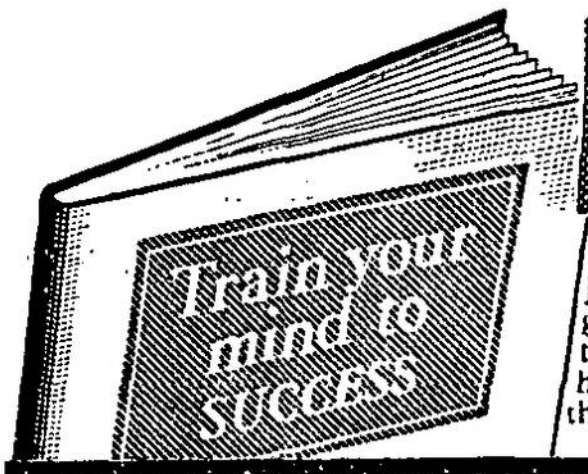
18 A printer turns turtle (8).

22 Led around the tree and was beaten (6).

23 Polonius was stabbed in this French town (5).

24 Ate into a little creditor to provide food (5).

25 A grasping sort of courage (5).



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